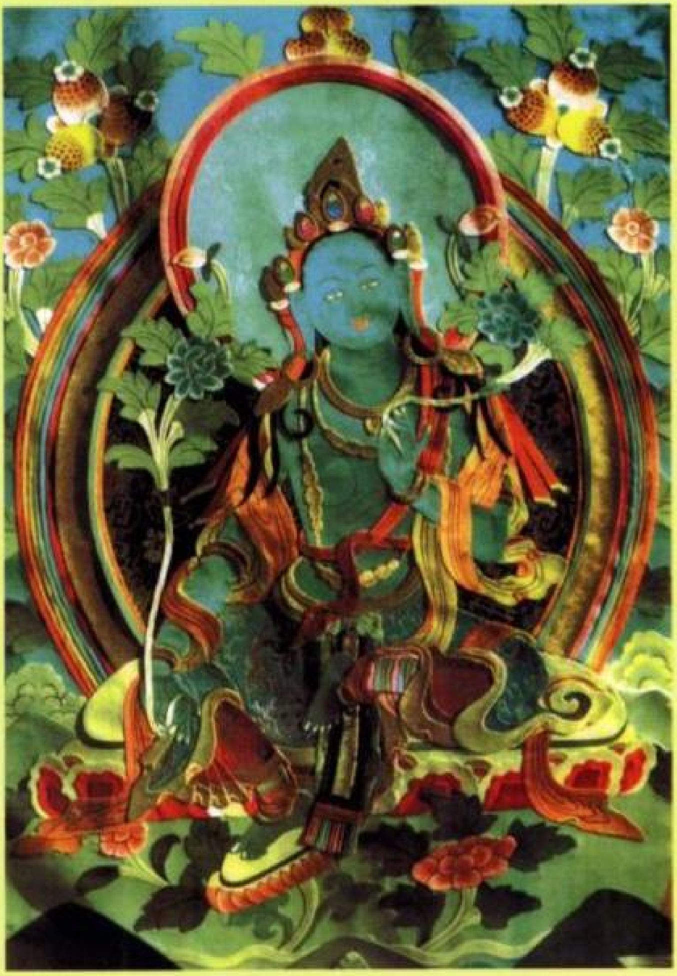

TARA

The Feminine Divine

Bokar Rinpoche

Tara
The Feminine
Divine

Immanent nature of samsara and nirvana
the clear light.
The saintly Lama shows the mode of being
the clear light.
May the fortunate ones who practice
the mahamudra-clear light
become buddhas in the heart of awakening
the clear light.

BOKAR RINPOCHE

To Juanita Hall
May the reflection of her kind heart shine and benefit all beings.

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Tara
The Feminine Divine

Bokar Rinpoche

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Introduction

A DIFFERENT WAY OF THINKING

This work is not a study of Tara and the context of the deity as they would be envisioned by a Western scholar but rather a presentation of the way a Tibetan understands things. To understand will require some effort on the reader's part.

Our approach to history and what science tells us about the reality of the world instill habitual ways of thinking that dare not go beyond what our senses and reason allow us to perceive. The Tibetan traditional mind moves in a larger world. According to it, perception of senses and intelligence have some value but are too limited to sufficiently describe reality. Thousands of years of history form only a split second in relation to the infinity of time. The Earth is only a grain of sand among the immensity of worlds; and beings that we see—human and animal—are only a small part of the possibilities of existence. It easily envisions as real what we consider without hesitation as belonging to the domain of myth and legend. For the traditional Tibetan mind, historical truths and mythical truths are not contradictory, they are intertwined and complete each other gracefully.

Who is right? Westerners and their belief in what can be seen or Tibetans and their belief in what cannot be seen? It is perhaps an endless debate in which we will not participate here. It is certain that readers not used to the Tibetan way of thinking will be surprised and possibly distressed at the manner in which things are presented in this book. Without any doubt, they will have the feeling of completely wandering in mythology or in fairy tales, in a universe with which they are not directly concerned. However, if the readers make the effort to enlarge their vision of the world, it will not be without benefit; not only will they be able to understand how a thought other than theirs functions, but they will gain entry to larger, more diverse, and mysterious worlds. Where is reality? Who knows?

BOKAR RINPOCHE AND TARA

Bokar Rinpoche has the deepest devotion to Tara. Already in his monastery in Tibet, Bokar Rinpoche in a previous incarnation consecrated a shrine to Tara. In Mirik, India, where Bokar Rinpoche founded a new monastery, he reserved a room for Tara, the Drolkhang—a shrine devoted to Tara.

It is in the Drolkhang that Bokar Rinpoche spends most of his time. Behind him on the wall, hangs a White Tara thangka painted with gold. On each side of this thangka, there are thangkas of other life deities such as Amitayus (Tsepame) and Ushnishavavijaya (Namgyalma). On the wall facing Bokar Rinpoche, there is a representation of Green Tara in silk appliqué from Tibet. But above all, on Bokar Rinpoche's left (the visitor's right) there is a vast and magnificent shrine containing many statues of Tara gathered in tiers. The central statue is the size of a human being and adorned with precious and fine ornaments. In its heart, Bokar Rinpoche has placed a small Tara statue that he inherited from his previous incarnation. This statue, carved out of a meteorite, is famous for not having been made by human hands but dropped from the sky. It is supposedly traced to the ancient Nalanda University which sheltered several thousand monks when buddhism was blooming in India, more than 1500 years in the past. When Bokar Rinpoche visited the Nalanda and Sarnath museums, he noticed statues dating from this time, and they were very similar to his statue.

Bokar Rinpoche carries a reliquary, as all Tibetan lamas do, which contains another Tara statue from the 18th century that he considers very precious. It was given to his previous incarnation by the 11th Situ Rinpoche, a great lama who had his monastery in Kham. When Bokar Rinpoche travels, he always takes this reliquary with him, and it is not unusual for him to use it to give blessings while reciting Tara's praise.

Finally, in the recently constructed retreat center of his monastery, Bokar Rinpoche has also reserved a special shrine to Tara, which contains many beautiful statues.

When Bokar Rinpoche speaks of Tara, he does not merely impart intellectual knowledge. While keeping in his deepest heart the secret of his relationship to the deity, he cannot hide the beauty of the pure love that links him to her.

GENESIS OF THIS BOOK

In 1990, Bokar Rinpoche produced a book on Avalokita (Chenrezig) to answer the demand of his disciples. This book proved valuable not only for understanding this deity but also for understanding the foundations of Vajrayana. Seeing how beneficial this book was, Bokar Rinpoche wished to dedicate a second book to Tara. This was realized during a sojourn in Mirik in the Fall of 1996. Bokar Rinpoche delivered oral teachings in Tibetan during several encounters. This explains why part of the text appears as a dialogue whose style we preferred to retain.

May this work, in spite of the passage from oral to written, the translation defects and the imperfection of the translator, reflect some radiance of Tara the divine! —François Jacquemart (Chöky Senge)

Note

Deities are mentioned by their Sanskrit names followed by their Tibetan names in parentheses.

Some general dharma terms in the text are given in Sanskrit in parenthesis. When it is a Tibetan word, it is preceded by "Tibetan."

1 – Tara the Divine

Buddhism, as it was introduced to Tibet, contains many deities— Tara is one of them—tied to the tantric tradition. Tibetans who, in their childhood, start to evolve within this divine world seldom question its nature. They are naturally drawn toward these familiar faces and accomplish rituals and meditative practices associated with them.

Westerners, however, find themselves in the presence of a new universe which seemingly has no equivalent in their culture. This leads them to ask many questions. Before trying to define who Tara is, it may be useful to first understand what the deities are—both on the ultimate level of their essence and on the relative level of their manifestation.

THE PLAY OF ULTIMATE AND RELATIVE

Deities, as we see them, are not essentially superior individuals living in faraway worlds that sometimes come to the rescue of human beings, even if their manifestations may give that impression.

In truth, if we realize the true nature of our minds,[1] the deities reveal themselves as being not different from our own minds. As long as we do not realize it and live in the duality I/other, the deities enter the play of duality and a relationship is established between these two poles of manifestation, I and the deity.

Let us suppose that in a dream we meet a deity. We would be sure of the individual existence of that deity. Also, we would be sure of the reality of the "I" who, upon seeing the deity, would feel joy and devotion. However, in truth, the person perceiving the deity and the deity would both be manifestations from the same inexpressible essence, the mind itself. In the same way, for those who live on a relative level, the deities appear on a relative level without being separated from their essence, which is none other than the essence of the mind.

To understand the true nature of deities, we must always remind ourselves of the two levels of reality:

– *Ultimate truth,* beyond notions of subject and object, I and other, beyond concepts and words, truth is always present and always "true," but it is not experienced by ordinary beings.

– *Relative truth,* "false" in essence but "true" for the people who experience it, a truth founded on the fallacious perception of subject and object, of an "I" and another.

If, from our point of view, there is an "I" and the "deity," from the point of view of the deity, there is neither an I nor another, neither subject nor object. This does not imply the absence of manifestation, but that this manifestation is without duality. It lacks a "center and circumference."

The true nature of the mind is the nature of the mind as it is, free from any psychological elaboration and free from all mistakes and illusion, subject and object.

Why is the nature of the mind called "divine"? This is because it is without suffering, pure of any disturbances, and because it is superior bliss. This happiness is different from the relative happiness that we experience in the ordinary world. It is not a transitory happiness depending on objects or depending on relationships of an "I" and "another," but a happiness inherent to the mind itself, beyond all duality. This happiness cannot be altered by any fear or suffering. This genuine and immutable happiness is itself the deity.

A MEANS AND A REALITY

Deities in a relative sense, as we have sketched above, are the deities as they now appear to us in various forms and colors, adorned with diverse attributes and ornaments.

Although these deities are not located on an ultimate level, from the point of view of our mode of perception, they are not separated from the ultimate.

In effect, their nature is such that practicing with deities leads to the realization of the ultimate deity, that is, the mode of being of the mind. In this sense, they constitute a means. However, this does not mean that the deities are simply an artifice.

In reality, they are what is called the "Body of Enjoyment of Awakening" (Sambhogakaya[2]); in other words, an extremely subtle level of manifestation. This Body of Enjoyment is not separate from the Absolute Body (Dharmakaya), the awakened mind beyond manifestation that does not differ from the ultimate deity. The Body of Enjoyment is an expression of the dynamics of the Absolute Body, an expression that is never separated from its origin. Deities are linked to the ultimate essence of the mind, not only as a means of accessing it, but by their very nature.

From the point of view of the path leading to awakening, these deities appear as external to our mind, as an expression of the buddhas to help us in our progress, because of our dualistic thinking.

From the point of view of fruition—that is, once we have fully realized the nature of the mind—deities are no longer seen as external but as the manifestation of the Absolute Body, beyond duality, beyond any notion of "I" and "another," the Absolute Body with which our mind has merged.

TOWARD THE BODY OF ENJOYMENT

Let us take Tara as an example. Now, when we practice Tara meditation, we must make a mental effort to imagine her as she is, green in color, hands making certain mudras, legs in a definite position, adorned with various attributes, and so on. In a certain way, Tara is then the creation of our psyche, and we remain, at least partially, prisoners of the idea that there is "me" on the one hand and Tara on the other. This mental creation is not useless. As a reflection of the Body of Enjoyment, this mental creation is linked with it and allows us to approach it.

Once the ultimate realization is obtained, this same Tara is no longer the fruit of any mental effort. Without her form disappearing, she reveals herself as a spontaneous expression of the Absolute Body, a clarity of the mind in which there is no subject and no object.

There is also a difference between the deity as we imagine it, and as she exists in the reality of the Awakened Mind.

It is also said that the Body of Enjoyment does not serve to benefit a buddha but it benefits others. From our point of view, it is true. However, from the point of view of a buddha, there is no I and no other. This means that a buddha does not think he or she must produce Bodies of Enjoyment or must help others. As we have seen, the Body of Enjoyment is a spontaneous expression of the Absolute Body. The activity that is exerted is spontaneous, lacking will and effort, lacking also the notion of a reality inherent to the manifestation, and the idea of an "I" who helps and "another" that is helped.

That the deity may first appear as external, then reveal itself as inherent to the nature of the mind without idea of external or internal, may seem difficult to understand. The difficulty comes from a dualistic conceptual approach. For us, there is an "I" *or* another, external *or* internal, and if we cannot imagine that it can be otherwise, we cannot really understand what matters. Only the realization of the nature of mind will give us direct experience of this reality.

Question: The Absolute Body of a buddha is emptiness in essence and is not subject to interruption. Does the Body of Enjoyment, that is, the expression of the clarity of pure mind, manifest in a permanent or intermittent way?
Answer: Emptiness and clarity cannot be conceived as two separate entities. They are undifferentiated. There is no longer a moment when emptiness would be associated with clarity than a moment when it would not. Emptiness and clarity are only a way to describe a unique reality. Therefore, it is not possible to say that the manifestation of the Body of Enjoyment is intermittent. It is why the Body of Enjoyment is qualified as "permanent."

Question: The Body of Enjoyment manifests in extremely various aspects that we see represented in the form of various deities. Is the diversity necessary?
Answer: On the one hand, this diversity derives from the nature itself of things. The possibilities of expression of a buddha or clarity of the nature of mind are infinite. This is why the forms of the Body of Enjoyment are infinite. Nothing can limit them. For this reason, it is also called "Body of All Forms." All forms are possible. All colors, all ornaments, and all attributes are possible. It is also said that limitations of an ordinary body do not apply to the Body of Enjoyment. The hand of a Body of Enjoyment cannot only touch objects but it can also see, hear, experience taste, think, and so on. This applies to any part of the body.

From the point of view of practice, on the other hand, the diversity that is proposed to us is a means to fight our strong tendency to believe in the reality of phenomena as we are able to perceive them. The multiplicity of forms tends to show us that what they really are is bigger than our understanding. If there were only one deity, only one form of the Body of Enjoyment, this would lead us, without any doubt, to implicitly accord to the deity a level of reality similar to ours. We conceive ourselves as an entity limited to a body and we would probably conceive the deity as an entity limited to a body. The diversity of forms and the understanding that they all are the various expressions of the unique nature of the mind, the Absolute Body, help us not to fall into this flaw in understanding.

THE DIVINE COMING FROM THE HUMAN

We have explained that, to benefit beings, fully awakened beings, such as the buddhas, spontaneously assume, in a nonintentional way, various forms on the level of pure manifestation normally inaccessible to ordinary human beings. They are called the Body of Enjoyment. These forms can be diversified: male, female, peaceful, wrathful, and in several aspects. These deities come directly from the compassionate activity of the buddhas. If the deities have a feminine appearance, they are called goddesses.

From a relative point of view, however, some deities are considered the result of a human ascending to the divine. There are men or women who have embarked on the dharma path, rid themselves of all imperfections of the ordinary state, and have seen the qualities of the awakened state bloom within themselves. They have reached a divine state and become "gods" or "goddesses."

Tara may be seen as belonging—at least from the point of view of pedagogical truth—to the latter category. As we will see, she was first an ordinary being, then she passed through all of the levels of the path, and she finally attained the result and became a goddess.

Question: Do masculine deities more represent the skillful means, that is, the compassionate activity, the dynamic pole of awakening, and feminine deities the "knowledge," the static pole?

Answer: At the level of representation, in some way, yes. These representations conform, in fact, to our own habits of perception. As we perceive the human gender divided into men and women, deities are also presented in masculine or feminine forms to which we attribute certain characteristics. However, from the point of view of the reality of the Enjoyment Body, means and knowledge are always indiscriminately united to the essence of the deity.

Question: Deities are often called "yidams" in Tibetan. What does it mean?
Answer: Yidam is a term referring to practice done with a deity. This designates the deity corresponding to our wish, to our aspiration, the one with whom we have a connection.

Question: Does it mean that everyone must choose his or her yidam or that the lama may give a particular yidam to each individual?
Answer: In most cases, no. In reality, all yidams serve the same function, and it is not certain that we have a strong connection with any particular one. However, we can say that our karmic predispositions made us meet one of the great orders of Tibetan buddhism in particular. The same predispositions make us situate ourselves within a framework where we will be led to practice this yidam rather than another. Kagyupas practice three great yidams, Vajravahari (Dorje Pamo), Chakrasamvara (Korlo Demchok) and Jinasagara (Gyalwa Gyamtso). Gelukpas practice Guhyasamaja (Sangwa Dupa) and Yamantaka, the Sakyapas Hevajra (Kyepa Dorje), and so on.

However, it may happen that an individual feels a particular aspiration to practice a certain yidam. In this case, the person will practice this yidam regardless of the school it is associated with. It can also happen, although it is not frequent, that a lama, having discerned a special connection, gives a particular yidam to a disciple to practice.

This was the case for Birwapa who first began practicing Chakrasamvara. After some time, he had such bad dreams that he preferred to give up all practice. He was then requested to practice Hevajra, a practice through which he quickly attained realization. This does not mean that Chakrasamvara was a bad yidam, but that Birwapa in his past lives had a weak connection with Chakrasamvara whereas he had already acquired a great practice of Hevajra. This made the result happen sooner. It was then necessary for him to give up Chakrasamvara to practice Hevajra. Generally, connections are not that obvious.

Question: Among the yidams mentioned, we do not find Tara. What is her place?
Answer: Tara (Drolma), like Manjushri (Jampalyang) and Avalokiteshvara (Chenrezig) are yidams common in all orders and for all Tibetan buddhists.

Question: Are male yidams more appropriate for men and female yidams for women?
Answer: Not particularly. A man may very well practice a female yidam, a woman a male yidam, and vice versa.

ABSOLUTE TARA

What we have said about deities in general also applies to Tara. Tara's identity, as with that of other deities, may be envisioned from two different points of view, that of "pedagogical truth" and "certain truth." Pedagogical truth complies with our ordinary mode of thinking and certain truth goes beyond that.

This double identity of Tara is not a contradiction: One does not negate the other.

From an absolute point of view, because of her nature itself as an awakened deity, Tara could not be other than the nature of our own mind.

Let us clarify what this nature of the mind is. It is beyond any concept, beyond any mental elaboration, and beyond notions such as:

- existence and nonexistence
- nothing and something
- material and immaterial, and so on.

Beyond concepts does not mean nothingness. The nature of mind is the domain of awareness itself, of the experience itself of pure awareness. No intellect, no reasoning, no word can grasp it or express it. However, it is present and cannot be negated.

This awareness, inherent in everyone beyond any mental elaborations, also is Tara in the ultimate domain.

Other names are used to designate the ultimate Tara. She is notably called "perfection of knowledge" (prajnaparamita).

The perfection of knowledge has no form, it is emptiness of the Absolute Body (Dharmakaya). This emptiness, however, as we previously explained, has the capability to manifest itself purely as the Body of Enjoyment (Sambhogakaya). It is on the level of the Body of Enjoyment that feminine deities such as Tara, Vajravarahi (Dorje Pamo), and many others appear. All of them are in essence the perfection of knowledge or the nature itself of our mind.

It is also said that Tara is the "Mother of all Buddhas," which refers also to her essence. The nature of mind, perfection of knowledge, and emptiness are, in fact, equivalent terms. All past buddhas have attained buddhahood by realizing emptiness (or realizing the nature of the mind). It is the same for present buddhas and it will be the same for future buddhas. Thus, Tara— the Tara beyond time, space, and all concepts—is the mother of all buddhas.

FROM WOMAN TO DEITY

Even if it seems disconcerting, the existence of Tara on an ultimate level as we have described it, does not hinder or contradict her existence on a relative level, also called the level of "pedagogical truth."

According to stories of this pedagogical truth, known through the work of Tananatha,[3] a 16th-century lama of great realization and scholarship, Tara was a woman before becoming a deity.

Her story began incalculable ages ago, in a world called "Multicolored Light," where the Drum Sound Buddha dwelled. One of the king's daughters at this time, called Wisdom Moon, possessed great faith and devotion to this buddha. For many years, she made immense offerings to this buddha and his entourage of monks.

One day, she decided to take the bodhisattva vow in the presence of the Buddha Drum Sound, that is, to promise to attain awakening to benefit beings in infinite ways. The monks rejoiced greatly at her decision, and considering that she would accumulate great merit by this activity, advised her to pray in order to obtain in a future life the body of a man. This would allow her to benefit beings and the dharma better than in a female existence.

Wisdom Moon, distressed by their narrowness of mind, answered them from the point of view of the ultimate nature of all things:

Here, no man, no woman,
no I, no individual, no categories.
"Man" or "woman" are only denominations
created by confusion of perverse minds
in this world.

She added that there were many who followed the path in a man's body, few in a woman's body. "As for myself," she said, "as long as samsara is not emptied, I will benefit beings appearing in a female body." Such was her promise.

Her practice then allowed her to realize ultimate truth. Having become a goddess, she has placed millions of beings on the path of awakening each day.

Dwelling for some time in a particular state of concentration called "concentration that frees beings from samsara," she was known as "Savioress," or "Tara" in Sanskrit. It is said that she liberated an infinite number of beings in the morning and an infinite number in the afternoon.

In another cosmic era, the kalpa of Perfect Victory, when Buddha Amoghasiddhi lived, Tara entered another state of concentration to protect beings from danger, fears, and demons. This state is called the "concentration that completely vanquishes demons." Again, she benefited many beings, providing help as soon as they called upon her. Because of the swiftness of her activity, she was known as "Swift and Courageous."

Later, during the kalpa Without Beginning, there lived a monk called Stainless who received the empowerment of compassion of all the buddhas' mind. He became the deity Avalokiteshvara (Chenrezig). The five Victors, the buddhas who reign over the five families of awakening, gave him a special empowerment. This caused Tara to arise from his heart, coming through this mode of manifestation to accomplish the buddhas' wishes and work at benefiting beings during that kalpa. (In some versions, Tara appears from Avalokiteshvara's tear drop.) For this reason, Tara also has the name of "Daughter of the Worlds' Sovereign," that is, daughter of Avalokiteshvara.

Tara, the Swift and Courageous Daughter of the Worlds' Sovereign, has been benefiting beings during many kalpas by manifesting in various ways and accomplishing various activities through particular states of concentration.

Such is Tara's story in the domain of manifestation.

Question: Generally, a "pure land," a paradise, is attributed to the deities and they dwell in it. What is Tara's pure land?

Answer: Tara dwells, as Avalokiteshvara, in the pure land of Potala, manifested on Earth by a mountain in Southern India. Nevertheless, a pure land is attributed to Tara. It is a particular domain, called "Harmony of Turquoise Leaves."[4]

TARA'S HELP AGAINST FEAR

Having infinite compassion for suffering beings, bodhisattvas make wishes that lead them to act in one way rather than another to actualize their wishes. Likewise, Tara's main activity is to brush away fear and danger.

What is fear? How does Tara help deal with it? It is what we will try to understand now.

During our existences, we face two kinds of fear.
– The first fear is not obtaining what we wish.
– The second fear is not being able to eliminate danger, threat, or circumstances painful for us.

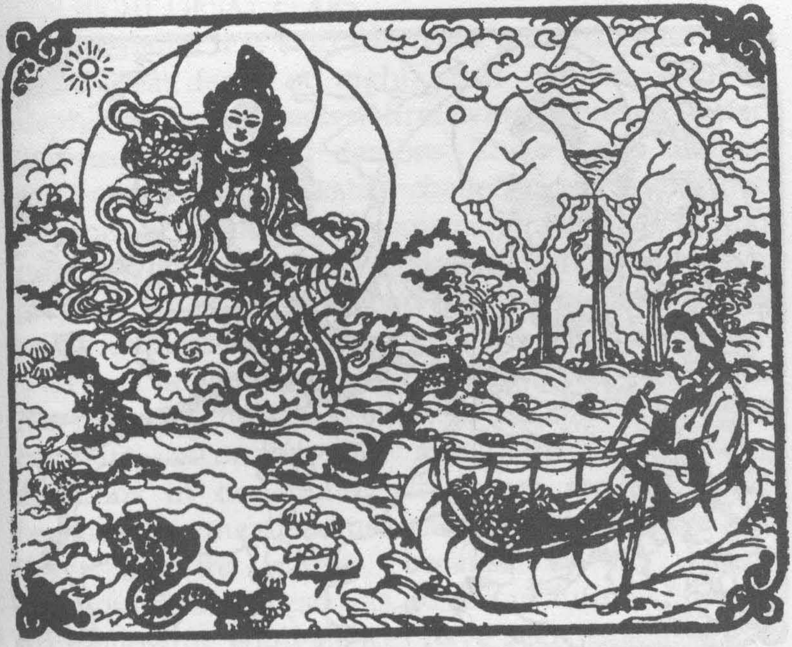
Because of one or another of these reasons, we often find ourselves afraid at various levels, from worry to fright.

If we look closely, we see that the real cause of fear is none other than the ego itself, or more exactly, attachment to the ego, the "I." The greater this attachment, the more numerous are the fearful states. All that threatens "me" in one way or another engenders fear. All that "I" risks to lose engenders fear. Fear and a belief in the reality of "I," fear and attachment to oneself are very closely related.

On this profound cause, various factors are grafted such as circumstances of existence but also some karmic predispositions. The karmic predispositions sometimes engender fear apparently without reason, or a state of almost permanent worry that no outer event can justify.

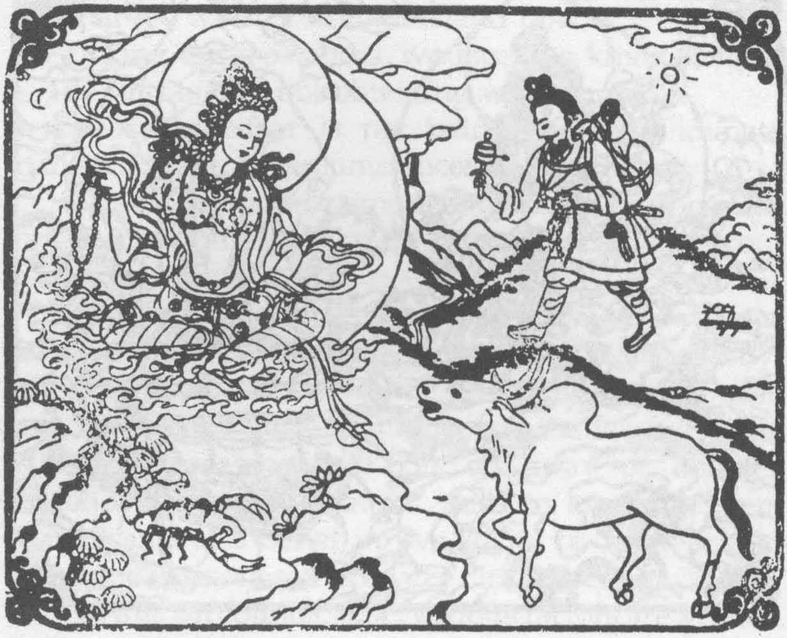
The correlative to any feeling of fear is the desire to find help and protection. However, the outside world is often impotent to provide us any of the help we want, to such an extent that fear leads to despair.

What the world cannot give us, the reality that transcends this world, incarnated by the buddhas and bodhisattvas, can give us. Particularly, the activity of all the buddhas directed toward elimination of fear and danger is found within the divine person of Tara.



Tara has the power to help us. However, this power is effective only if we trust it. For Tara to help, we must pray to her and call upon her from the bottom of our hearts without reserve or doubting her intervention. The deity's response depends on the strength of our trust. If doubt inhabits our mind, there is a small probability that Tara's blessing and protection will come to us, whereas a trust without reserve and a complete conviction, will insure that they will certainly come.

In reality, all worldly appearances are a manifestation of our mind. Fear, apprehension, and danger are also a manifestation of our mind, just like in a bad dream the mind creates both the threat and the one who feels it.



The creative faculty of our mind is very strong. It is this strength that exerts itself in the fervent prayer addressed to Tara. Together with Tara's immense will to help beings, this strength makes possible the protection. The help that we receive is the fruit of the meeting of these two factors, the force of our devotion and Tara's compassion.

We must understand that if phenomena had reality in themselves, no change would be possible. By the fact that they are empty in nature, they are only expressions of the deep conditioning of our mind that can be changed. This explains the efficiency of our prayer and Tara's answer.

It is also why, when the nature of the mind is realized, all fear disappears.

THE EIGHT GREAT FEARS

Traditionally, it is said that Tara protects against the eight great fears or eight great dangers such as elephants, lions, snakes, fire, water, thieves, fetters (imprisonment), and demons. These eight dangers were certainly the greatest challenge one could meet in ancient India. Nevertheless, the list is not exhaustive. Tara protects against all dangers whatever they are when we call upon her to help us and pray to her with confidence.

There is another interpretation of the eight great fears. Firstly, they may refer to physical dangers in our life, secondly, they designate the afflicting emotions in our mind, which are major dangers because they may lead us to accomplish negative acts. They are the causes, because of the karmic consequences of these acts, of all our future suffering. The following equivalences have been established:

– elephants = blindness
– lions = pride
– fire = anger
– poisonous snakes = jealousy
– thieves = erroneous philosophies
– imprisonment = greed
– water = desire and attachment
– demons = doubts

To protect us from inner fears, Tara dissipates the afflicting emotion itself, which is the cause of, as well as the suffering that is the result.

Many stories from ancient times report Tara's intervention to save a person from a threatening snake, another from the danger of fire, another from the demons' attacks, and so on. However, for those who pray to her, the helping activity of Tara remains today what it was in the past. Some contemporary stories illustrate that.

TARA AND THE TOOTHACHE

When Kalu Rinpoche[5] was at Palpung retreat center in Kham—he was probably 17 or 18 years old at the time—he had a terrible toothache. Tara appearing to him in a dream said, "You have no particular devotion to me nor do you do my practice. However, I will give you a mantra to recite 10,000 times, and you will be healed." Kalu Rinpoche complied and the next day was completely relieved of his toothache.

He thought that Tara's intervention was because of a connection he had with her in a past life since he had not placed any importance on her until then. From that time on, he was much devoted to Tara.

TARA'S JUDICIAL SUCCESS

Travelers passing through Darjeeling may have seen the Bellevue Hotel at the top of the city. The hotel belongs to Mr. Lhawang, a Tibetan whose mother had great devotion to Tara. Everyone called her "Amala," "Mother."

Every day, Amala recited the praise to the deity, and each year made a large donation to monasteries sponsoring recitation of 100,000 praises. She did not know the dharma very well but her faith in Tara was extraordinary.

She belonged to a family of Tibetans who had settled in India a long time ago, and her husband had important responsibilities in the colonial British administration. At the time of independence, most of the British decided to leave India quickly so many of her husband's British friends sold their houses in the

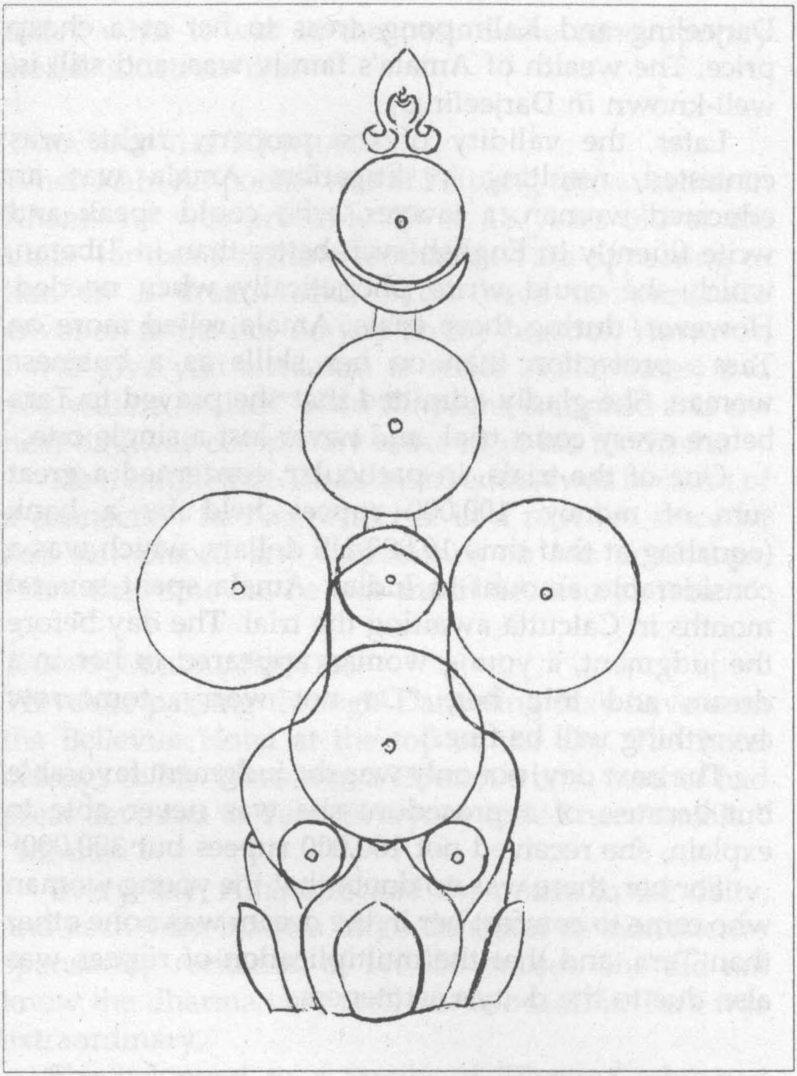
Darjeeling and Kalimpong areas to her at a cheap price. The wealth of Amala's family was, and still is, well-known in Darjeeling.

Later, the validity of the property rights was contested, resulting in litigation. Amala was an educated woman, a lawyer, who could speak and write fluently in English even better than in Tibetan, which she could write phonetically when needed. However, during these trials, Amala relied more on Tara's protection than on her skills as a business woman. She gladly admitted that she prayed to Tara before every court trial, and never lost a single one.

One of the trials, in particular, concerned a great sum of money, 100,000 rupees held by a bank (equaling at that time 10,000 US dollars, which was a considerable amount in India). Amala spent several months in Calcutta awaiting the trial. The day before the judgment, a young woman appeared to her in a dream and told her, "Do not worry, tomorrow everything will be fine."

The next day, not only was the judgment favorable but because of a procedure she was never able to explain, she received not 100,000 rupees but 300,000!

For her, there was no doubt that the young woman who came to comfort her in the dream was none other than Tara, and that the multiplication of rupees was also due to the deity's astuteness.



Tara's torma

The deities' tormas (or tentor) are symbolic figures made of dough or clay, adorned with circular ornaments chiseled in colored butter. They represent the deity's presence on the shrine.

In Sonada, Kalu Rinpoche's monastery in India near Darjeeling, Amala donated a great Tara statue surrounded by smaller representations of twenty-one Taras that can still be seen in the temple. Her devotion to Tara was so exclusive that, Kalu Rinpoche, having a Padmasambhava statue placed above them for a while, was told by her that this was not acceptable.

For six years, Amala was the benefactor of the two Sonada retreat centers, providing food and all that was necessary for the twenty or thirty meditators there. She herself stayed in retreat for three years in a small house at the foot of the monastery. There, she assiduously prayed to Tara. She would sit, not facing the shrine, but perpendicularly to it. One day, she came to see Khenpo[6] and myself requesting that we quickly go to her retreat house. As she would talk a lot about unnecessary things, we doubted the importance of what she wanted to communicate. However, we followed her. She ushered us inside, asked us to close the door and said, "Look at my shrine!" In fact, something extraordinary had happened. Tara's torma, instead of remaining in its normal position, had spontaneously turned very slowly toward Amala.

Amala died at an old age while visiting her daughter who was working at the Indian Embassy in Madrid.

Amala's story is filled with teachings. Most of her life, she was a woman attached to worldly wealth and money, praying ceaselessly for Tara to conserve or increase what she owned. Her motivation was neither deep nor generous. She was not thoughtful of others or her future destiny. However, by continuous devotion to Tara and by keeping the deity in her heart, she received Tara's blessing, and her mind changed little by little. Toward the end of her life, she met Kalu Rinpoche. She had no lama to guide her until then. She detached herself from material belongings, sincerely turned to the dharma, and remained in retreat. Up to that time she was tied up with her wealth, but then she made large offerings to the Sonada monastery and retreat centers.

Such is Tara's blessing, that it turns her devotees toward their own good beyond their limited wishes.

TARA REUNITES A FAMILY

At Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim, there lives 50-year-old Khenpo Gyurme Tsultrim who testifies to the protection Tara gave to his family.

In 1960, Kham (the eastern province of Tibet) was invaded by the Chinese. As a young boy, Khenpo had to flee the area in company of his family and others. It was a difficult and long trek.

One day, they found themselves facing a contingent of Chinese troops in a narrow valley. They could not avoid the troops and decided to press forward, ready to die if necessary. They swallowed sacred pills that they carried with them, checked that the sacred objects they had were secured, and launched their horses. Rifles rang out. There were people dead on both sides.

Of the hundred Khampas in the small caravan, seventy made a successful escape and gathered on a nearby mountain. Khenpo Kyurme Tsultrim, his father, and one of his sisters were among them. His mother and another sister were missing. His father and other men went to look for them but were unsuccessful. Were they killed? Were they made prisoners by the Chinese? No one knew.

One year later, after much difficulty, Khenpo Gyurme Tsultrim, his father, and his sister finally arrived in India where they obtained refugee status. For twenty years, they heard nothing of the mother and sister who remained in Tibet. They believed them to be dead.

Actually, they had been arrested by the Chinese and led back to Kham. Without any protection, they lived as best as they could working for almost nothing for people who needed their services. The Chinese law against religious practice at that time was extremely severe. Anyone caught whispering prayers or reciting mantras was immediately punished. Khenpo Gyurme Tsultrim's mother, however, had great faith in Tara. As often as she could, she secretly recited Tara's praise and mantra. Notably, when she watched over sheep and yaks, she arranged to give something to eat to the children who went with her and asked them to watch the animals grazing nearby. As soon as she was alone, she recited prayers and humbly asked Tara to find her lost husband and children. At night, while others were asleep, she prayed even more.

After months and years of supplication, a young woman appeared in her dream and told her, "Have no fear, you will find your husband and children."

Time passed. At the beginning of the eighties, the Chinese loosened the shackles imposed on Tibet a little. They opened the borders and allowed exiled Tibetans who wished to visit their motherland to return. Khenpo Gyurme Tsultrim and his father learned through other relatives that the mother and sister were still alive and lived in a certain place.

As soon as they could, they went to Tibet and returned to India with the two women who had been lost for so long. Prayers had been heard and the young woman's prophecy in the dream had been realized.

Surrounded by their family, Khenpo Gyurme Tsultrim's mother and father passed away seven or eight years later.

TARA PROTECTS THE CARAVAN

In 1958, I had to go to Tsurphu, the Karmapa's seat in the Lhasa area. It was there that I studied when I was 13 to 16 years old. The Karmapa[7] asked me to come back to accomplish the traditional three-year retreat on my twentieth birthday. To go from Bokar monastery isolated in the high Western plateaux to Tsurphu would take two months for a caravan.

In the Lhasa area, brown sugar was rare and well appreciated. For Western nomads, it was easy to acquire some by exchanging wool and butter at the Ladakh border. My previous incarnation used to offer a block of this sugar to every monk when he went to Tsurphu. This made the monks very happy. Consequently, I told myself that we should follow this custom, and we prepared a large quantity of sugar to take with us.

Besides this precious treat, our caravan carried many presents for the Karmapa, offerings for rituals, and all that was necessary for my three-year stay. In all, not counting horses, we had about thirty mules and a hundred yaks loaded with two big bags each, most of them containing fifteen blocks of sugar.

In 1958, the road to Lhasa was extremely dangerous. We did not fear the Chinese but the

Khampas troops who were fleeing with no other means of subsistence than to take flocks, horses, and food by force, when they were passing a nomad encampment or caravan. Given all the animals in our caravan, as well as food, clothes, and valuable objects that we carried, we represented an ideal prey for the Khampas, an encounter beyond their expectations!

To obey the Karmapa, it was indispensable that we go to Tsurphu however dangerous it might be. Who could protect us better than Tara? To be assured of her help, I asked the monks of the monastery, the nuns of the neighboring nunnery, and the lay people to come together if they could and recite 100,000 praises. A hundred people showed up, and it took us about ten days to accomplish the recitation.

Then, we left. On our way, on several occasions, we could not avoid crossing the route used by Khampas' troops. By changing our itinerary, we were able to avoid them most of the time. Nomads that we met were warned of their coming. They tried as much as possible to save their belongings and herds by hiding them farther away. Generally, it had no effect because the Khampas violently forced them to reveal their hiding places. Talking with the nomads, we also knew that horsemen from the East would soon arrive.

Although we had been warned, it was impossible for us to evade them. We went off the path to set up our encampment but it was not sufficiently hidden to avoid being seen. From where we were, we could see clearly the Khampas coming, menacing, and demanding ransom from the nomads who had given us a warning. It should have been inevitable for them to see us. Our white tents, impressive number of yaks, mules, and horses could only attract attention. For inexplicable reasons, however, they did not see us! Certainly we were scared but we never ceased to pray to Tara and recite her praise.

We took advantage of night to continue on our way. We finally reached our destination without further incident.

Even now, when I recall this road to Tsurphu, I am convinced that our safe journey was due to Tara's blessing and her kind protection.

TARA'S SNOW

Because of the troubles caused by the Chinese, I did not stay in Tsurphu to accomplish the three-year retreat as had been previously decided. I resigned myself to return to my monastery and prepare to flee Tibet. Before leaving, again I asked people to recite 100,000 Tara praises.

We took the path to Nepal. About sixty people, monks and laypeople, accompanied me with horses, mules, yaks, goats, sheep, and as much luggage as we could carry.

After three days on the road, and having set up camp for the night, some men from our caravan informed me of the presence of Chinese troops ahead of us. They had just been warned by fleeing Khampas who had to turn back after an encounter with the Chinese during which they lost many horses and yaks. What were we to do? Were the Khampas telling the truth? Would the Chinese remain in their position? An alternative road was possible, but was it safer than the original one?

We accomplished the ritual of Tara and of the protectors. I then decided to proceed to a "divination by the dough." In this method, the various possibilities are written on small pieces of paper and rolled into some dough balls of the same shape. Then, a ritual is held during which one holds in one hand a saucer upon which the balls are placed and makes the balls turn until one falls on the ground. That ball gives the answer. In this case, we had written two answers referring to the route we should normally follow, "danger" and "no danger." The ball containing "danger" fell first.

Therefore, we had to take the other road, which was longer, required going through a very high pass, but was apparently less risky. When we reached the pass, snow began to fall, causing us many great difficulties. We had trouble moving forward and many animals died. We lost several bags. In spite of this, we were able to get over the pass and finally arrived at Mustang, a small kingdom of Tibetan culture within Nepal.

Later, I learned that the Chinese were really pursuing us and we were close to being caught. Only the snowstorm hindered them from overtaking us. For us, the storm made everything difficult. Just after we passed through, the route was impassable. If the snow had not fallen or had fallen slightly earlier or slightly later, we might have been caught.

I could not help thinking that this timely snowstorm could only be Tara's blessing; Tara, whose help we did not cease to invoke.

Many Tibetans think that they owed their safety only to Tara's protection when they were forced to flee their country. The savioress' intervention in favor of those who pray to her is not a rare incident concerning isolated cases. Many people report the help they have received from her.

Question: Tara's activity is to protect. There are also "protectors" like Mahakala and others whose function is also by definition to protect. What is the difference between them?
Answer: The protection that happens is slightly different in the two cases. Mahakala and other protectors have as a main activity to specifically brush away obstacles to the practice and diffusion of the dharma, whatever outer or inner circumstances that would harm the dharma. Tara's protection is more personal if we can say that. She watches over us in all difficult circumstances in our lives.

THE SAHIB WITH A RAINBOW BODY

Question: Sometimes, Westerners think that some cultural differences prevent them from entering as easily as the Tibetans themselves into the practice of Tibetan buddhism, especially in regard to deities. They may believe, for instance, that Tara's protection is more accessible to a Tibetan than to a Westerner. Is there really a barrier?
Answer: Kunu Lama Tenzin Gyatso, who passed away at a very old age in the seventies, was a learned and respected lama. Because he was born in the Kunu area, between Kashmir and Ladakh, he was called "Kunu Lama." Besides the Tibetan language, he knew Sanskrit and had perfectly studied the doctrines of all the lineages of Tibetan buddhism as well as Hindu doctrines. The Dalai Lama himself received many teachings from him. At the same time, Kunu Lama led a simple life. He had no monastery, not even a servant, and discreetly dressed like the pundits of Northern India where he spent the greatest part of his life.

During a teaching Kunu Lama was giving in Bodhgaya,[8] he told the following story. In the mid forties, he was living in Kham where he was in retreat. His residence was a two-story house. He lived on the first floor, and the second floor was occupied by a Westerner who also practiced buddhism. At this time, that was a very rare occurrence. Both were receiving instructions from a Nyingmapa lama called Khenpo Shenga. Kunu Lama and the local people habitually called the foreigner "Sahib," using the respectful term used by Indians for Westerners.

Who was this sahib? From where did he come? I do not know if Kunu Lama ever precisely answered this. Maybe he was someone who fled from India during World War II, maybe he was a missionary—there were a few of them in Kham—who had entered Tibetan buddhism.

It happened that no one had seen the sahib for several days. Finally, someone noticed rainbows stemming from his window. Puzzled, Kunu Lama and a few others went to the second floor, opened the door, and sure enough, in the sahib's place, they saw only rainbows. They shook his clothes from which more small rainbows escaped falling like rain! Of the sahib, only nails and hair were left.

It is what is called obtaining the "rainbow body," an extraordinary result of the practice that ends with the dissolution of the body in rainbows at the time of death.

If a sahib from the twentieth century was able to obtain a rainbow body, then access to Tibetan buddhism is not limited by cultural barriers. From the very moment they practice diligently, Westerners can certainly obtain results. Especially, they can pray to

Tara being certain to be heard. Tara's blessings do not know any borders.

WONDROUS REPRESENTATIONS

In Tibet, many stories relate of Tara's statues or paintings that miraculously have spoken out.

One of the most famous stories is that of a fresco representing White Tara painted on the wall of the main temple of Tashi Lhunpo, the residence of the Panchen Lamas in the city of Shigatse.

Following the passing away of one of the Panchen Lamas, monks were performing rituals in his honor. Their throats choked with sadness, they had difficulties uttering his name when it occurred in the text of a praise concerning him. It is said that Tara's fresco, taking over and encouraging them, uttered very loudly the name of the Panchen Lama every time it was required.

Another extraordinary phenomenon linked to Tara is the appearance of "spontaneous sculptures," that is, representations of the deity, which appear by themselves on rock walls without intervention of a human hand.

One of them is very recent. It is in Nepal, west of Kathmandu, beneath Yanglesho cave (famous for having sheltered Padmansambhava).

The first time I went on a pilgrimage to Yanglesho, in 1972, Tara's appearance on the rock wall had not yet begun. Now, after a slow unexplained process, the form of the deity thirty centimeters high appears more and more clearly, exiting out of the rock. A small temple has been built to protect and honor it.

Why does this statue produce itself today? Maybe it is a kind of response to the prayer that many buddhists address to Tara requesting her protection in these difficult times.

VARIOUS TARA ASPECTS

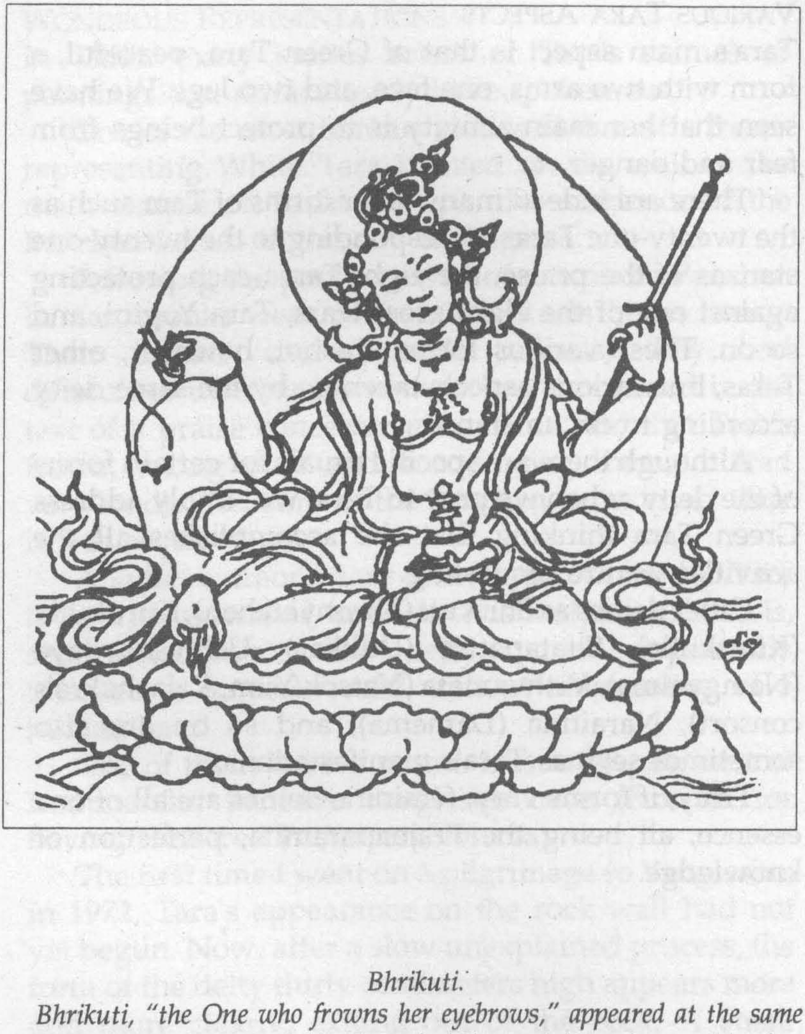
Tara's main aspect is that of Green Tara, peaceful, a form with two arms, one face, and two legs. We have seen that her main activity is to protect beings from fear and danger.

There are indeed many other forms of Tara such as the twenty-one Taras corresponding to the twenty-one stanzas of the praise, the eight Taras each protecting against one of the eight great fears, Tara Yogini, and so on. These various forms are not, however, other Taras, but various aspects taken on by the same deity according to circumstances.

Although there are specific rituals for certain forms of the deity, when we pray to Tara, we simply address Green Tara thinking that she accomplishes all the activities we are requesting.

Other deities as Bhrikuti (Thronyerchen), Kurukulla (Kurukulle), Sitatapattra (Dukkar), Ushnishavijaya (Namgyalma), Vishvamata (Natsok Yum, Kalachakra's consort), Naraitma (Damema), and so on are also sometimes seen as Tara's manifestations.

Truly, if forms vary, feminine deities are all of one essence, all being the Prajnaparamita, perfection of knowledge.



Bhrikuti.

Bhrikuti, "the One who frowns her eyebrows," appeared at the same time as Tara from Avalokiteshvara's (Chenrezig) teardrop and is often considered as an aspect of the deity.

WHITE TARA

Among various Taras, White Tara occupies a special place beside Green Tara. She enjoys great popularity because of her activity, which is to provide a long life. That is the reason why her empowerment is sought and her practice performed when one's health is threatened. Also, a thangka or a statue of White Tara is offered to a lama as a prayer for his or her long life.

White Tara is not a deity different from Tara. There is no separate story recounting her origin, and her activity is only a particular aspect of the protection granted by the deity.

Her mantra is also the same as Green Tara's, OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA, even if we add to it an ending particular to the request of long life, MAMA AYU PUNYE JNANA PUTRIN KURU SOHA.

White Tara is also called Chintamattra Chakra, the "Wheel Accomplishing All Wishes." This name comes from the way the root mantra is placed in her heart. The ten letters are effectively placed vertically on the ten spokes of a wheel placed horizontally, eight of them going from the hub to the rim as the spokes of an ordinary wheel, the other two exiting perpendicularly on each side of the hub. On the highest spoke, there is the syllable OM, under the lowest spoke, the syllable HA, on the other spokes the eight other mantra's syllables, TA RE TUT TA RE TU RE SO.

WHITE TARA ORDERS STATUES

The following story illustrates the specific activity of White Tara.

A Kadampa Geshe dreamed that he saw the sun rise in the West and set in the East. He mentioned the dream to a lama who told him that the dream was unauspicious, that it was a sign of death. Worried, the Geshe consulted a palm reader. Observing the lines of his hands, the palm reader declared to the Geshe that he had only three years to live.

Fearful of this prediction, the Geshe thought that from now on he had no more time for studying or engaging in other activities and that he must devote himself exclusively to practice. He went to see a lama, told him of his dream and the indications of the lines of his hands, and explained that he wanted to devote whatever time he had left to live to a practice that will quickly bring him near awakening.

"Your worry is useless," answered the lama. "There is a White Tara practice that prolongs life. Do it, and everything will be fine."

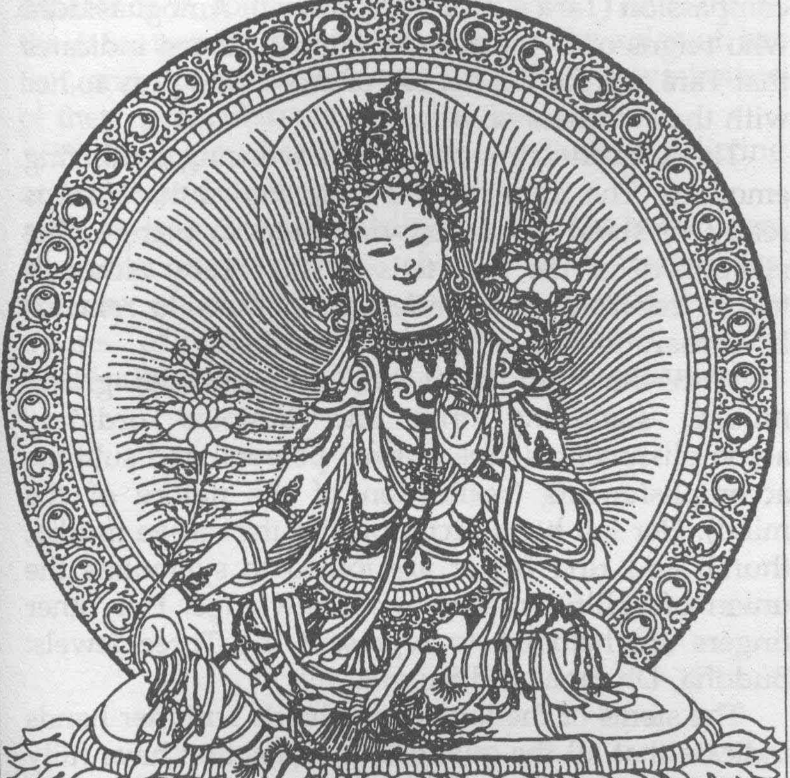
The Geshe followed this advice so well that he soon had a vision of the deity who declared that he would live to be sixty years old.

As his sixtieth birthday approached, the Geshe turned his mind to Tara. Tara again appeared to him and said that if he was to make a statue of her, he would add ten more years to his life. So he did. Ten years later—at the age of seventy—the same process was repeated. Requested to realize a new statue, he obtained ten more years.

Finally, on his eightieth birthday, fifteen more years were all that was left for him, so he lived to be ninety-five years old before he died.

TARA'S SYMBOLISM

The deity's form, colors, and attributes are associated with a symbolism called the "pure sense."



Green Tara

The symbolism of Green Tara and White Tara are as follows:

Green Tara

Her green color is that of the awakened activity, active compassion (Tara is also the consort of Amoghasiddhi who reigns over the activity family). Green indicates that Tara acts for the benefit of those who pray to her with the swiftness of wind.

The left bent leg represents renouncing conflicting emotions. The right half bent leg shows that Tara is ready to stand up to provide help to beings. The symbolism of the legs tells us that Tara, although totally free from the imperfections of samsara, remains in samsara to help all those who suffer.

With the right hand, she performs the giving mudra, signifying that she bestows ordinary accomplishments (supernormal powers) and sublime accomplishments (realization of the nature of the mind). Her left hand accomplishes the refuge mudra, thumb and ring finger are joined to symbolize the union of skillful means and knowledge. Her other fingers are held up to represent the Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

The stems of the lotuses she holds with her hands indicate that all the qualities of realization have fully bloomed within her.

Her charm and beauty reveal that she is the mother of all buddhas and her compassion for all beings is uninterrupted.

The ornaments (silks and jewels) she wears bear witness of her masterful qualities and activity.

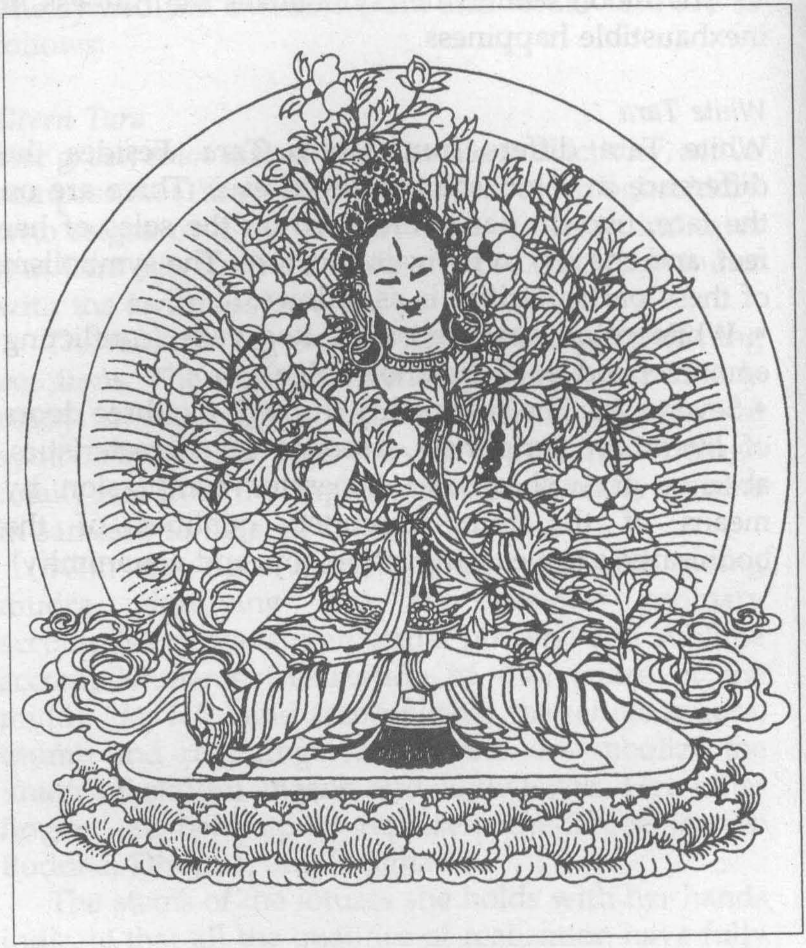
Her straight back shows that her meditation is similar to the diamond that never falters.

The moon behind her symbolizes the fullness of inexhaustible happiness.

White Tara

White Tara differs from Green Tara. Besides the difference in color, she has seven eyes. Three are on the face, two on her palms, two on the soles of her feet, and she sits in the vajra posture. The symbolism of these particularities is as follows.

- White color: absence of the two veils (conflicting emotions and dualistic knowledge)
- Seven eyes: She sees reality through the three doors of liberation (emptiness, absence of characteristics, absence of wishes) and generates compassion by means of the four unlimited qualities of the bodhisattvas (love, compassion, joy, and equanimity).



White Tara.

On the thangkas, White Tara is recognized at first glance by her color. When we face a statue or a drawing, it is easy to distinguish White Tara from Green Tara. Green Tara's legs are in the Bodhisattva Posture (right leg in front) and she has only two eyes; White Tara sits in the lotus posture and has seven eyes including one on her forehead.

2– Tara's Tantra

What we know of Tara and the practices linked to her originally comes from the tantras. These are not texts revealed in an ordinary way but in circumstances where the buddha takes an aspect of the Enjoyment Body and addresses human beings less than gods, celestial bodhisattvas and a host of beings with whom ordinary beings do not usually communicate. These texts are the foundation of Vajrayana practice, empowerments, visualizations of deities, and recitation of their mantras.

WHAT IS A TANTRA?

The word tantra (Tibetan, *gyu*) means "continuity." In a literal sense, the term refers to the nature of mind, the mind beyond any psychological elaboration, in all its purity. This notion of continuity underscores that the nature of mind is not something new to obtain, something that could not exist now and would come into existence at the end of practice. Continuity is present at the base (what we are now), path, and result. Whether it is veiled or revealed, it is always there without discontinuity, as the union of emptiness and clarity.

Within the framework of the sutras, the continual presence of this emptiness-clarity at various stages is expressed in the following way.

- at the level of the base: the two truths (relative and ultimate)
- at the level of the path: the two accumulations (merit and wisdom)
- at the level of result: the two Bodies (Absolute Body and Formal Body)

Within the framework of the tantras, it is said,

- at the level of the base: body and mind
- at the level of the path: the creation and completion phases
- at the level of result: the two Bodies of Awakening (Formal Body and Absolute Body).

རྒྱུད

Gyu
Tantra: "continuity"
of the nature of mind

Base, path, and result are terms that take the nature of mind as a reference point. When the nature of mind is impure (that is, veiled) it is the base. The path indicates purification and the result the purified mind. Outside this process of purification, the essence of the mind does not change. It is the same during the three steps. Such is the continuity or "tantra" in its true sense.

By extension, the verbal expression of this continuity and the means to realize it are also called "tantra." It is why the Vajrayana texts are called tantras. Traditionally, it is said that there are two sides to the tantras:

- "tantras of words," which expresses the unchanging nature of the mind
- ultimate or "real tantra," which is this unchanging nature.

Buddhas are those who have realized the real tantra. When they utter the tantras of words in one way or another, they show how the nature of mind is found covered by ignorance and various conflicting emotions (base) for the ordinary beings of samsara, then they give the means to purify it (path), and they describe the qualities of an entirely purified mind (result).

ENCRYPTED LANGUAGE OF THE TANTRAS

Tantras, as texts, are extremely difficult to understand because the words they use cover various levels of meaning. A literal expression can sometimes be revealed as completely erroneous. Tantras are said to have a total of ten levels of interpretation gathered in two groups, the "six possibilities" and the "four modes."

- the six possibilities:
  - pedagogical meaning
  - definitive meaning
  - with intention
  - without intention
  - in a known language
  - in an unknown language

Let us take the example of the meaning "with intention." If we encounter a phrase in a tantra stating, "Animals must be killed," this really means "make conflicting emotions disappear."

- the four modes:
  - common meaning
  - hidden meaning
  - literal meaning
  - definitive meaning

"Common meaning" signifies that the sense of the word used is common to the sutras and tantras. "Hidden meaning" is that which is applied to some notions inherent in the subtle channels and winds, as they are used in the practice of the six yogas of Naropa, for example. "Definitive meaning" implies that the word must only be understood in the context of ultimate truth, mahamudra, or maha-ati.

Understanding tantras requires studying them under a qualified teacher able to decipher their meaning. Otherwise, even if we grasp the apparent meaning of the words, our understanding will remain far from the true meaning. Even a Tibetan scholar who has done no special study of the tantras cannot understand them. A khenpo or a geshe very knowledgeable in grammar and logic who would have studied all the mysteries in the sutras, the philosophy of madhyamika, or the epistemology of abhidharma would not be prepared to know the tantras.

For example, the tantra considered to be the root of all others is the *Tantra of Enunciating Manjushri's Names* (*Manjushri Nama Samgiti Tantra*).

The clarification of this text may be done on many various levels. There are treatises explaining it on the levels of Kriya Tantra, others at the level of the

Charya Tantra, Yoga Tantra, the creation phase of Anuttara-yoga Tantra, the completion phase of the Anuttara-yoga Tantra, and so on. Without specific study of these various facets, the text will remain mysterious to us.

Furthermore, to truly understand a tantra, a mere intellectual approach is not sufficient. A good personal Vajrayana practice and the Lama's blessing are necessary.

In the Tibetan tradition, studying tantras has been and remains reserved to a small number of individuals. In the Gelugpa order, for example, only the best of the geshes have access to a tantric university where they may study more particularly Guyasamaja, Chakrasamvara, and Yamantaka Tantras. In the Kagyupa order, only a small number of lamas or khenpos directly study the tantras, mainly the Hevajra Tantra or the *Zamo Nangdon* (*Profound Inner Meaning*), a tantric text written by the Third Karmapa.

ORIGIN OF THE TARA TANTRA

The origin of Tara Tantra, as with that of all tantras, cannot be located in time. Tantras belong to the omniscience of the buddhas who utter a tantra as it is needed in a given epoch. Therefore, it is impossible to give them an origin. They are eternal in reality. Likewise the Tara Tantra, which resides in the eternal knowledge of the buddhas, had already been revealed during many past kalpas before being revealed in our time.

As far as our kalpa is concerned, the Tara Tantra was revealed many times by Avalokiteshvara in his Pure Land, the Mount Potala, long before the arrival of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Our kalpa is divided in four parts:
- *totally endowed* designates the beginning of kalpas, when human beings lived an extremely long time, completely and easily enjoyed all necessary material goods and experienced great happiness due, notably, to right thinking and a great love for one another.
- *endowed with three-quarters:* life duration, material goods, and happiness start to decrease.
- *endowed with two-quarters:* decreasing is accentuated.
- *endowed with conflicts:* the difficult epoch in which we are (to which belong, in fact, all our history and even before) when the lifespan of human beings is limited to one hundred years and there is only a quarter of the original happiness.

Avalokiteshvara revealed the Tara Tantra the first time in the "totally endowed" epoch in a form comprising 800,000 stanzas; a second time in 600,000 stanzas in the "three-quarter endowed" epoch; a third time in 12,000 stanzas during the two-quarter epoch; and finally, a fourth time in 1,000 stanzas during the conflict epoch when Shakyamuni Buddha had not yet appeared in this world.

UTTERING OF THE TANTRA BY SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA

These Tara Tantras uttered by Avalokiteshvara are not those we now have. Ours are those of Shakyamuni Buddha, who revealed them in the following circumstances:

The night preceding his awakening, while sitting under the Bodhi tree, Shakyamuni was attacked by a horde of demons attempting to divert him from his goal. At that moment, Tara appeared and with eight great laughters made the demons fall to the ground and stopped them from doing harm. The Buddha then placed his mind in a state of perfect meditation and at dawn attained awakening. After that, he uttered the Tara Tantra. However, it was not the time when the tantra was being communicated to human beings. Many more centuries would be necessary for that to happen.

When the tantras were uttered by the Buddha, they were not addressed to human beings but to a host of bodhisattvas, gods, nagas, and other beings. Most often, it was not in human places but in other domains of manifestation like Avalokiteshvara's Potala. Most tantras, including that of Tara, were placed under the guard of Vajrapani (Chana Dorje), who for this reason is called the Guardian of the Secrets. Before there were human beings, there were other categories of beings able to receive tantric teachings and spiritually benefit from them.

Texts for the Tara practice would appear long after the Buddha's time though divine revelation. Likewise, the scholar Chandragomin received 108 texts of practice during visions he had of the deity.

TANTRAS AMONG HUMAN BEINGS

The first communication of tantras to human beings was made through the intermediary of King Indrabhuti, a contemporary of Shakyamuni Buddha. He obtained these tantras in two ways. Sometimes, they were revealed to him by Vajrapani or other bodhisattvas, and he wrote them down as soon as he heard them. Other times, he received them directly in a miraculous way, the text having already been written. However, Indrabhuti kept these texts secret, locking them in trunks and transmitting their contents only to a few predestined disciples. Time was not ripe for full propagation.

History tells us that the Tara Tantra especially was communicated to human beings only three centuries after Shakyamuni Buddha's passing away (around the 3rd century BCE).

If one makes an exception for the brief and confidential episode of King Indrabhuti, only the teachings of the Smaller Vehicle were made available. Without talking about the Vajrayana, even the teachings of the Greater Vehicle were not propagated. It is only in this epoch that sutras of the Greater Vehicle and all the teachings of the tantras, which had been kept by celestial bodhisattvas, began to reach especially pure beings. They were transmitted during visions of Avalokiteshvara or Manjushri, or as in the case of Indrabhuti, through miraculous gifts of a text presented by a deity.

Revelation of all the tantras began in the same way, thanks to visions, like that of Vajrapani. Relatively few individuals followed the tantric path because transmission was done from a teacher to a disciple solely in an individual context. Practices were kept very secret, and no one could say with certainty that such and such a person was a tantric adept.

Tara was one of a number of deities who were secretly practiced. Some stories are related to this time, reporting Tara's intervention to save her followers from danger. Let us give two examples. The first one refers to danger caused by enemies and the second to that of lions.

The son of a king fell asleep in a park when a group of enemies who had sworn to assassinate the prince surrounded him. The prince suddenly woke up and saw that there was no way to defend himself but to pray to Tara. From the bottom of his heart, he called upon her for help. Tara then manifested herself, emitting from the soles of her feet a mighty wind that dispersed all the enemies.

In the other story, a man walking in a forest met with a starving lion (it seems that there were lions in India up to a certain time). Our man prayed to Tara. A young woman came by carrying a load of leaves. It was none other than the deity's emanation and she protected him from the lion.

HAYAPALA'S LINEAGE

The principal propagation of the Tara Tantra was done by a Bengali monk called Hayapala who belonged to the Brahmin caste. After having assimilated many teachings of the Great Vehicle, he met the Brahmin Guhyashila who had received instructions on Tara from Vajrapani directly. From Guhyashila, Hayapala received the Tara empowerment, and under his direction performed the practice of the Liberating One. This led him to his realization.

Hayapala then went to Uddiyana (northwest India) where dakinis transmitted various tantras to him as follows:

- *Fundamental Tantra on Tara's Origin*
- *Violent and Wrathful Tantra*
- *Secret Tantra of the Sublime Unsurpassable Vajra*
- *Tantra of Producing Heruka*

He then returned to India and stayed in the city of Tipurar where he built a temple especially to house these tantras. He transmitted the Prajnaparamita teachings and the sutras of the Greater Vehicle to his ordinary disciples. To the gifted disciples, he transmitted the Tara practice through which many of them achieved realization.

Hayapala then transmitted Tara's lineage to his disciple Hayagosha who passed it on to Nagarjuna. It is because of the Tara practice that he attained realization. Then, the transmission went on uninterruptedly.

The Tara practice was later introduced to Tibet through many channels. Taranatha, our main source of information on the origins of the Tara Tantra, received transmission from a disciple of the Indian teacher Chiwa Bepa who had also come to Tibet.

Before Taranatha, Atisha, who had bonded with the goddess, played an important role in the propagation of the practice in Tibet.

ATISHA AND TARA

It is interesting to note that Atisha's life was marked by a profound bond to Tara. This bond seems related to his coming to Tibet. His relationship to the deity will illustrate for us how Tara manifests her activity.

Miraculous Transformation

As soon as Atisha was born, the goddess clearly indicated that she would protect the child. Atisha was born in 982 CE, the second son of a royal family from Bengal. His parents named him Chandragarbha, Moon Essence. While the newborn was sleeping in his cradle on the upper floor of the palace, the king and queen heard mysterious music coming from outside. The queen saw a lotus fall from the sky and land in front of the cradle. At the same time, the child's face was transformed into Tara's face. Everyone concluded from this that Tara had been his tutelary deity for many lifetimes.

Choosing Ethics

When Atisha became a teenager, his father, the king, organized many great parties in which many princesses and their entourages participated. All of them, charmed by the beauty and attitude of the prince, looked upon him with desire. A pale blue goddess who was none other than Tara appeared and admonished Chandragarbha.

"If, like an elephant sinks deeply in mud, you, a hero, sink into the quagmire of desire, would not this stain the robes of ethics you have worn for 552 previous lifetimes in which you were always a scholar without defect, a perfect monk? Like the swans looking for lakes adorned with lotuses, you must seek ordination in this life!"

Having become a monk at the age of 29, Atisha ardently devoted himself to study and practice.

In time, his fame spread and he was invited several times to Tibet where the persecutions against buddhism by King Langdarma had created a critical situation. However, Atisha was reluctant to abandon his monastic responsibilities as Vikramashila's Abbot and to go to this reputedly difficult Northern country. Several interventions by Tara were necessary to convince him.

How to Make Amends for a Fault

One day, Atisha approved the expulsion of the monk Maitrepa from Vikramashila University. Maitrepa's behavior was slightly out of the norm but his yogic realization was immense. A little later, Atisha had a dream in which Tara appeared and told him:

"The monk you have expelled is a bodhisattva. It is not permitted to act against a bodhisattva even involuntarily. Any one not knowing how to rectify a mistake like this will be reborn with a body as large as Mount Meru upon which thousands of birds and insects will feed."

"How can I avoid that disastrous consequence?" asked the frightened Atisha.

"You must go to the Northern country and devote yourself to propagating Mahayana teachings there," answered Tara.

The Yogini's Message

Tara appeared again to Atisha in a dream and requested that he visit a certain temple where he would meet a yogini who had something important to tell him. The next morning, he went to the temple and met the yogini. Having offered her some flowers, he told her. "I was invited to go to Tibet. Will my mission be successful?"

"Your journey to Tibet will be very fruitful," answered the yogini. "Besides, you will meet a lay person (Drom Tonpa) there who will be a tremendous help to you."

Tara's Warning

When the Tibetan King Jangchub O sent emissaries to invite him to his country, Atisha again consulted Tara on the opportunity to accept. The deity told him. "If you go to Tibet, it will be extremely useful. However, your life will be shortened."

"How many years?"

"If you do not go to Tibet, you will live to be 92 years old. If you go, you will die at the age of 73."

"Twenty years of my life are not really important," thought Atisha. "If I sacrifice them, I can work to benefit beings and spread the doctrine."

Thus, at the age of 59, Atisha left the warm plains of India to reach the high plateaus of Tibet buffeted by icy winds. He devoted the rest of his life to teaching in Tibet and died there.

By this story we see not only how Tara was an inspiration for Atisha but also we see her ardor in leading her beloved child to the Land of Snow.

From the eternal omniscience of the buddhas to their transmission in the Land of Snow, passing through the celestial worlds and the great realized yogis of India, such was the path followed by the revelation of the Tara Tantra.

Question: The history of propagation of the Greater Vehicle and tantras as presented by the Tibetans, and as we have just seen it, often leads Western scholars to doubt the authenticity of these teachings. They note that the texts do not date from the Buddha's lifetime, that when they appeared, several hundred years had passed since the Buddha lived. Their introduction to human beings, after having remained in divine worlds, seems to be a mythological artifice to disguise their time origin. For them, Greater Vehicle and tantras are creations that came long after Shakyamuni's original teachings upon which they were improperly grafted. What can the Tibetan tradition answer to these arguments?

Answer: It is difficult to give a satisfactory answer to these Western scholars. Their method of working and the framework in which they place their thoughts do not permit the acceptance of the Tibetan vision of things. From their strict point of view, they are not wrong. With no belief in the deities' existence, how could they understand that great practitioners effectively communicate with deities, receive instructions from them, and even obtain texts, which miraculously fall from the sky? What proof is there to give them? For them, proof would be only what everyone could see or observe. However, in the spiritual domain, very subtle experiences depend on one's own karma and inner development. Such a practitioner cannot prove to others that he or she perceives the visions allowed to come because of the purity of his or her mind.

In fact, science places laypeople in the same situation. We cannot verify ourselves the claims of scientists because of our lack of study or insufficient intellectual capabilities. When they tell us about atomic power, for example, we believe them without being able to really see the proof for ourselves. Only if a bomb explodes can we have this proof; if not, we subscribe to scientific affirmation like blind people.

In the Vajrayana, it is somewhat similar. As long as we have not attained the result, the realization by an individual practice, we are blind. Only realization provides us with the proof of truth of what is taught.

Another reason that makes understanding difficult for Western scholars is the conception that they have of the Buddha. For them, Buddha was a man, a man like any other, even if he was endowed with great wisdom. Therefore, his teaching is limited to the time and space provided by an existence in a human body. It is a narrow vision of what a buddha is. It is said that the nature of a buddha is an "inconceivable secret." At the same time, a buddha's body, speech, mind, qualities, and activity are covered by this inconceivable secret. "Inconceivable" well means what it means. The thought of an ordinary being cannot grasp what it is. The buddha's reality spreads in an infinite way and cannot be confined to the limits of common understanding. Otherwise, it would be "conceivable."

If the being of a buddha were limited to human life, it is true that the transmission of teachings in the celestial worlds and all these extraordinary things would lack meaning. But the being of a buddha is far from being locked in simple human appearance.

In fact, it is natural for everyone to hold to one's own point of view. In buddhism itself, during the course of time, various philosophical schools have been opposed to each other. Only a higher point of view allows us to see that the more narrow conceptions are not false but partially true. Likewise, when we study a science, the more subtle subjects analyzed at the end of the study do not destroy the validity of more simple things learned in the beginning.

We really are prisoners of our psychological constructions, which veil reality. The function of the Buddha's teaching is to rid ourselves of illusion created by thoughts and belief in the reality of phenomena. To do so, many approaches are proposed such as the Smaller Vehicle, Greater Vehicle, Vajrayana, pedagogical truth, definitive truth, and so on. All have the unique goal of eliminating mental constructions leading to the false conception of phenomena as having a reality of their own. Once we are totally liberated from mental elaborations, we are a buddha.

Outside of a spiritual way, the efforts of thinking or the exercise of the psyche do not allow us to achieve this result. They only add new constructions to the preceding ones. It is true, however, that in the three vehicles, we find methods which are also founded on psyche activity, but it is a skillful use of the psyche leading to the progressive elimination of these elaborations.

3–Invocation of Tara

FUNCTION OF RITUALS

A ritual is a means to accomplish a deity practice and to develop a deep bond with this deity. It is comprised of various phases, which are elements allowing us to establish this relationship, such as deity visualizations, making offerings to the deity, prayers, recitation of the deity's mantra, and so on. Through the ritual, our mind is imprinted with the deity's presence and blessing.

In buddhism, there are many types of rituals corresponding to various levels of practice.

The sutra tradition likewise possesses its rituals, such as those addressed to Shakyamuni Buddha or Baisajaguru (Sangye Menla, Medicine Buddha).

The Vajrayana tradition is divided into four groups of tantras, each having its own rules as to accomplishing rituals.

Rituals may be extremely long or very brief, collective or individual, but their function remains the same: recalling the deity to mind and allowing the deity to leave a profound and beneficial imprint on us through deity meditation, mantra recitation, and other components.

This imprint is formed by using all elements of our personality, body, speech, and mind.

- Physically, we prepare the shrine, place the offerings, and make sure that the shrine room is clean and orderly: our body takes the meditation posture and is put to use in doing the mudras (hand gestures symbolizing offerings, inviting deities, and so on). It is also the body which makes music offerings by playing the bell or other instruments. These various physical acts have no goal other than to increase the immersion of our mind in the ritual by the complete involvement of our person.

- Our speech recites the text and mantras, which serve as support to the activity of the mind. Words allow us to evoke what is conceived by the mind.
- Our mind, the main agent of the ritual, remains concentrated and present to what it does during all the phases: taking refuge, developing motivation of awakening, consecrating the offerings, inviting the deity, visualization, offerings, praising, reciting mantras, asking forgiveness for errors made during the ritual, the departure of the deity in his or her support, dissolving the visualization, and dedicating.

Understood in this way, the ritual acts upon our mind. On the one hand, it helps us to purify ourselves from the veil of ignorance and other veils. On the other hand, especially through the offering and praise, it allows us to accumulate merit and to create a positive karmic potential. Finally, it prepares the manifestation of the Body of Enjoyment, the manifestation of the true deity, inseparable from our own mind.

Question: During the rituals, we sometimes imagine the deity's presence facing us. Sometimes we imagine that we, ourselves, are the deity, or moreover that we are the deity at the same time the deity is in front of us, as is the case in

the Tara practice. What is the function of these various approaches?
Answer: In the beginner's mind, the belief in an "I" really existing is strongly anchored. This leads to the belief in the real existence of "another." This duality I/other rules all our perceptions. Imagining that we are the deity and visualizing the deity in front of us at the same time is a first step, a means to progressively rid ourselves of this dualistic tendency. When we attain a very good level of practice through meditation, at that time, although the deity appears in two different forms, both are perceived as unique in essence. We finally arrive at a stage where it is no longer necessary to imagine two forms of the deity, it is sufficient to consider ourselves as the deity, an essence in which all manifestation participates.

Rituals in the sutra tradition or in the first or second group of tantras, the Kriya Tantra and Charya Tantra, only contain the deity visualized in front of us; whereas rituals of the third group, the Yoga Tantra, most often imply the deity visualized in front of us and ourselves in the form of the deity.

Finally, rituals of the fourth group, the Anuttarayoga Tantra, propose either the deity visualized in front of us and ourselves as the deity perceived as inseparable or only ourselves in the form of the deity.

TARA RITUAL

There are many Tara rituals, which the various traditions of Tibetan buddhism use according to their preference. The one most often used in the Kagyu tradition is due to Chogyur Lingpa[9] who discovered some termas in the 19th century.

Termas are texts uttered by Padmasambhava in the 8th century in Tibet, then hidden to be discovered later by predestined "terma discoverers," in an epoch that would need them. These termas may take the form of materially written texts, hidden in rocks, walls, or other places, or directly given to the discoverer by a deity. They also can be revealed in the mind. In that case, they are called *gongters,* as was the case of the Tara terma received by Chogyur Lingpa.

Chogyur Lingpa dwelled in a cave in Kham called the Crystal Cave of the Lotus. At dawn, he had a vision of Tara who told him three times, "It is good, it is good, it is good," (Tibetan, *lekso, lekso, lekso*). This utterance of the deity was the blessing that opened Chogyur Lingpa's mind to the inner revelation of words spoken long ago by Padmasambhava. He titled this terma *Tara's Profound Drop,* "drop" meaning here that which collects the essential in a concise form.

Chogyur Lingpa disclosed what he had received only to one person, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo. The latter kept it secret for three years, then transmitted it to Jamgon Lodro Taye who gave definitive form to the ritual and widely disseminated it.

The terma is comprised of several texts corresponding to many stages of outer, inner, and secret practice. These stages can only be performed successively. The last two require the practitioner to be in retreat. We briefly present their characteristics.

OUTER PRACTICE

The outer practice has two main aspects:

– Accumulation of merit accomplished through the Seven Branch prayer, offerings, and praise.

– Attitude of praying: the practitioner requests protection of Tara, and asks her to grant what he or she wants. Because of this position of "requesting" adopted by the practitioner, accent is placed on the deity's presence in the sky (in the form of 21 Taras) in front of the practitioner.

The corresponding ritual is usually performed publicly. Given that it is a terma, it is preceded by prayers addressed to Padmasambhava. The various stages are as follows:

• TAKING REFUGE AND RECALLING THE MOTIVATION FOR AWAKENING. The practitioner places himself or herself under the protection of the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha), the Three Roots (Lamas, Yidams, and Protectors), and more specifically of Tara. The practitioner also renews the will to attain awakening for the benefit all beings suffering in samsara.

• SEVEN BRANCH PRAYER. The seven branches are as follows.

- homage to all buddhas and all bodhisattvas as an antidote to pride
- making offerings as an antidote to attachment
- confession of faults as an antidote to unwholesome acts
- joy in thinking of the meritorious acts done by the buddhas and ordinary beings as an antidote to jealousy
- request for teaching as an antidote to blindness
- praying for the buddhas to remain present as an antidote for erroneous views. One of the erroneous views is to believe that the buddhas' activity could be intermittent, that while present in a physical body, buddhas would help beings and when leaving their

physical body they would cease to help them. By requesting the buddhas to remain present among us with or without a body, we rid ourselves of the thought that death places an end to the buddhas' activity.

– dedication. We think that, collecting merit acquired through the above six branches, we dedicate it to attaining awakening for the benefit of all beings. This dedication is an antidote for "unskillful means," preventing us from dedicating merit for temporal and ephemeral goals.

• CONSECRATING OFFERINGS. The consecrated offerings, both placed on the shrine and evoked in our imagination, are: water for drinking, water for cleaning, flowers, incense, light, perfume, food, and music. Each offering is represented by a mantra and a mudra.

• SEVEN BRANCH PRAYER. This second Seven Branch Prayer is in a slightly different context from the first one. The first prayer, coming just after taking refuge, took as support the various places of refuge, especially Tara. The second Seven Branch Prayer refers to the Three Jewels in general.

• MANDALA OFFERING. Practitioners imagine they offer to Tara, buddhas, and bodhisattvas the totality of the universe gathered in the form of a mandala. The recitation of this section is done with the mandala mudra.

• MANIFESTATION OF OURSELVES AS TARA AND INVITATION OF THE 21 TARAS to come take their places in the sky in front of us. Tara's various aspects take place in the sky, the principal one being Green Tara.

• RECITATION OF THE PRAISE. The praise is recited in three successive sequences, first uttered twice, then three times, and finally seven times. Each sequence is separated by offerings.

– During the first sequence, Tara is visualized in front of us with her right hand in the mudra of sublime giving. We think then that she bestows on us the ordinary (various psychological powers) and sublime attainments (realization of the nature of the mind).

– During the second recitation, Tara makes the protection mudra. We think that she protects us against all fears and dangers.

– During the third recitation, we think that a luminous nectar coming from her right foot flows into us through the crown of our head transmitting her blessing.

- TORMA OFFERING. Practitioners offer the torma to the deity in order to approach her with requests.
- RECITATION OF TARA'S MANTRA. Tara's aspects who were in the sky have melted into the practitioners who continue to imagine themselves in the form of Tara during recitation of her mantra.
- REQUESTING INDULGENCE for the mistakes made during the ritual. This request is preceded by the recitation of Vajrasattva's (Dorje Sempa) One Hundred Syllable Mantra.
- DISSOLUTION OF VISUALIZATION. The practitioners, after having dissolved the visualization into emptiness remain for a moment in silence as the mind settles in its own nature.
- DEDICATION. The practitioners dedicate the merit of the ritual saying, "With this virtue, may I swiftly realize the Noble Tara and may I establish all beings in this realization."

- AUSPICIOUS WISHES. While they recite these wishes, the practitioners throw rice into the air which symbolizes the flowers that gods shower on earth.

Other prayers and long life prayers for the teachers generally conclude the ritual.

Those who wish to perfectly accomplish the outer practice, must commit to reciting 100,000 mantras as many times as there are syllables in the mantra OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA, that is, one million mantras.

INNER PRACTICE

The inner practice places an accent on the creation phase (Tibetan, kyerim) during which we visualize ourselves in the form of the deity.

This practice gathers 13 deities in a celestial palace:

- in the center, Green Tara (the practitioner)
- around Tara, the eight Taras protecting from the eight great fears, sitting in the same posture as Green Tara, accomplishing the mudra of giving with the right hand and holding a lotus on which there are various objects in the left hand.

– Tara protecting from lions, blue, with a vajra on the lotus
– Tara protecting from elephants, yellow, with a hook on the lotus
– Tara protecting from fire, white, with a water crystal[10] on the lotus
– Tara protecting from snakes, green, with a sublime medicine (arura) on the lotus
– Tara protecting from thieves, white, with a bow and arrow on the lotus
– Tara protecting from imprisonment, green, with a sword on the lotus

- Tara protecting from water, red, with a fire crystal on the lotus
- Tara protecting from demons, black, with a stick on the lotus

• Outside the palace, the "four female guardians," each guarding a gate of the palace facing the four directions. They stand up, lunging, their faces marked by a wrathful expression, each one holding special objects in her hands.

- In the east, the white female guardian holds a hook in her right hand and a bell in her left
- In the south, the yellow female guardian holds a rope in her right hand and a bell in her left
- In the west, the red female guardian holds a chain in her right hand and a bell in her left
- In the north, the green female guardian performs the threatening mudra with her right hand and holds a bell in her left

SECRET PRACTICE

The inner practice places the accent on the completion phase (Tibetan, *Dzokrim*) introducing the work on subtle energies (channels, winds, and drops). Nine deities are present:

• In the center of the celestial palace, Samaya Tara, green, in union with the male deity Hayagriva (Tandrin)

• Around her, there are four other aspects of Tara who, as in the inner practice, perform the mudra of giving with their right hand and hold in the left hand a lotus on which various symbolic objects are placed.

- In the east, Vajra Tara, blue, with a vajra on the lotus

– In the south, Ratna Tara, yellow, with a jewel on the lotus
– In the west, Padma Tara, red, with a hook on the lotus
– In the north, Karma Tara, black, with a sword on the lotus
- Outside the palace, there are the four female guardians of the four gates as previously described.

These three levels form a profound succession that is easy to follow and easily may form the practice of an entire life.

Question: In Tara's ritual, as in most rituals, we offer to the deity a small figure of dough called a torma or bultor (offering torma). What is the reason for this offering?

Answer: In general, offerings serve to accumulate merit and purify the veils. As for offering a torma, it serves more to present our personal requests to the deity. We ask her to act in our favor, in favor of someone else, or in favor of a particular goal. Following the torma offering, we recite a text in this sense. For example, it may be, "You, who fully rejoice in the mandala creation, consume this well-made offering torma. Give me and people around me, health, life, power, glory, fame, luck, and abundant wealth. Give me the accomplishments of activities, such as pacification, increase, and others. You who have made the promise, protect me, give me the support of all accomplishments. Brush away untimely death and illness, demons, and creators of obstacles. Brush away bad dreams, inauspicious signs, and unwholesome acts. Make the world happy, the years excellent, the harvest bountiful. Make the dharma spread, happiness perfect, and may all my wishes be realized."

Offerings and praise, whatever they are, are not in reality a favor that we do for the deity as far as she would be satisfied to obtain them or unhappy not to obtain them. It is for us that offering and praise are useful, decreasing our attachment to material objects and allowing us to accumulate merit.

Question: On the shrine, there is also another kind of torma—much larger—called a tentor (support torma). Tara's tentor was, for example, mentioned in the story of Mr. Lhawang's mother. What is its use?
Answer: The tentor serves several functions. Sometimes, it is a symbolic representation of the deity. In this case, it is the support of the deity's presence. Sometimes, it is an offering to the deity; sometimes, in the first part of the ritual, it is used as a support and then it becomes an offering in the second part.

These tormas may have various shapes, not only from one deity to another but sometimes for the same deity. Tantras, if they indicate the necessity for a torma, give no precision as to its shape. In the course of time, diverse traditions have used a great variety of shapes that were developed within various lineages.

Question: Is it a custom in all Tibetan monasteries to accomplish Tara's rituals every morning?
Answer: Not necessarily. Some monasteries do, others choose different rituals. In Sonada, Kalu Rinpoche established this custom. Here, in Mirik, because of the special devotion that the Khenpo and I have for Tara, we have also instituted the daily recitation of Tara's ritual by the monks of the monastery.

Question: Is there a day devoted to Tara?
Answer: Tara's day is the eighth day of the Tibetan month, that is, the first moon quarter (eight days after the full moon).

THE SIMPLE PRAYER

Question: How did Tibetan lay people express their devotion to Tara?
Answer: Lay people were not practicing Tara's ritual per se. It was more a monastic affair. However, most people knew Tara's praise, which they learned by heart as children. They used to recite it morning and evening, or while working, watching their herds, for example. They also recited Tara's mantra.

The lay people's faith in Tara was immense. If they knew the words of the praise, they did not grasp their meanings, which are very complex. But their devotion and the certitude that Tara was watching over them were enough for them.

Question: When we face sudden danger, how do we request Tara's protection?
Answer: It is a request from the heart, nothing complicated, simply, "Tara, protect me!"

Question: For Westerners, the praise in Tibetan is often difficult to assimilate. How can they express their devotion to Tara?
Answer: If they do not know the praise, they can recite her mantra with trust and devotion. In the time of danger, as Tibetans do, they can call upon Tara from their hearts. The blessing and protection are the same.

Question: Some people think that, from the perspective of ultimate truth, our mind and the deity being inseparable, the prayer lacks meaning, as though we were calling to ourselves for help. What is the value of such a point of view?

Answer: It is true that from the standpoint of ultimate reality, the deity and our mind are one; but we also must understand that from this ultimate point of view, there is neither suffering nor fear. In reality, that which appears now as suffering, fear, and danger is nothing else but a manifestation of our mind. Just as our mind, during a dream, can create appearances that cause us to suffer, threaten us, or make us afraid.

However, as long as we have not realized ultimate reality, we are exposed to suffering and fear that we conceive as real. It is in this relative context that the deity, who also appears to us momentarily as outside ourselves, brings us help when we pray to her.

This prayer, in a relative sense, is necessary as long as we remain in the relative level. The ultimate prayer is to dwell in ultimate truth, the nature of mind, beyond any duality, where the mind, appearances, and deities are revealed to be of a single essence.

Until we attain this level, while we perceive suffering and fear as real, we also call upon a deity that we perceive as existing outside of us. However, she really brings help and protection.

It is necessary to differentiate between the realization of nonduality and the present state in which all our experience is lived in a constant subject/object duality.

Question: The prayer we address to Tara may seem contradictory to the ideal of nondesire, of being content *with what we possess. Whereas other prayers say, for example, "Bestow on us the absence of need!" the prayer addressed to Tara seems to say "Bestow on us all that we desire!" In the text following the recitation of the praise during the ritual, it is written, "Through this praise recited two, three, and seven times, if we want a son, we will have a son; if we want wealth, we will acquire wealth; all desires will be satisfied."*

Answer: Tara answers the prayers of everyone whatever one's level of understanding. In her compassion, she seeks to relieve beings from suffering as it arises. If one's suffering is in a very material domain, it is a prayer expressing this material request to which she will respond. If, another person, having attained a deeper level, understands that the cause of suffering is the constant renewal of all our desires and prays for the absence of needs to be born within himself or herself, it is this absence of need that Tara will bestow. The person who prays for devotion to increase within himself or herself or for Mahamudra realization to be revealed, will also receive a blessing in accordance with his or her wishes.

Things may be understood on various levels. When it is said, for example, that the person who wants a child will get a child, from an ordinary point of view, it only means a child for a family for which great suffering would come from not having a child. In this case, Tara will grant protection against this suffering. On the contrary, it would be meaningless for a monk to pray for a child. However, from a deeper point of view, "child" means "disciple" (in Tibetan, disciple can be *lopma,* which simply means "student" or *bulop,* which means "student-child"). A lama may have the desire to obtain good disciples to continue his spiritual lineage, not with the goal of personal satisfaction as would perhaps be the case with a physical child, but to assure the continuity of teaching for the benefit of beings. It is thus legitimate for the lama to pray for obtaining these spiritual children.

Question: Does the simple fact of praying to the deity even for material needs imply some spiritual benefit like the accumulation of merit?
Answer: It depends on motivation. If someone prays, for example, for wealth with the thought that this wealth will be of use to relieve poverty, helping others in one way or another, or to make an offering, in this case, merit is accumulated because the prayer is motivated by an altruistic thought. If the person thinks only of his or her personal benefit, there is no accumulated merit. By his or her prayer the person will receive the deity's help to relieve his or her momentary suffering, but the prayer will not produce any merit.

However, as we have seen by the previous example of Amala who won all her trials by invoking Tara, only by addressing Tara with trust, even if we seek to obtain material benefit, our mind will receive the deity's blessing. This blessing, in the long term, will end by making us enter the path of true spirituality.

Question: The prayer addressed to Tara allows us to obtain all we wish, whatever our wish. And if our wish is not good like the wish of a thief to be successful?
Answer: The buddhas and bodhisattvas' dedication is entirely directed to benefiting beings. Buddhas and bodhisattvas have three great qualities: knowledge of

everything, love for all beings, and the power to help them. They help beings not only by love, but they make no mistake as to the means to accomplish this. Therefore, Tara answers the wishes of beings only if they are characterized by bringing them more happiness from a temporal and spiritual point of view. She would not respond to a wish leading to negative acts or further future suffering.

Given that we may be blind to what is good or harmful for us, in some prayers we ask the deity to use discrimination. For example, we say, "If this is good for me, may my wish be accomplished; if it is not good, may it not be accomplished," or "If this wish is not good, may its thought not form in my mind; even if it is formed, may it not be realized!"

Question: It is said that the law of karma is infallible, that we must necessarily experience the result of our acts. Praying to obtain that which we do not have or for eliminating painful circumstances in our existence, does it not go against this notion of infallibility?

Answer: Individual karmas are varied and of different kinds. Some karmas may not be modified. In this case, if we carry the karma for such a painful event to occur, it will occur. If, on the contrary, we do not have the karma for such a happy circumstance to manifest, it will not manifest. The prayer will hardly be able to modify things.

When we say that the law of karma is infallible, it means that a cause will necessarily produce its effect if nothing prevents it from happening. But if new elements come into play, a change is possible. Sincere devotion and prayer, as well as regret of past negative acts, are factors that can modify karma. There are profound means related to genuinely awakened beings or deities like Tara. That is why these means allow purification to change karma. Besides putting into work such factors, karma effectively produces its effects in an infallible way.

The seed of a weed will grow in an infallible way, unless we pull out the young sprout.

EMPOWERMENTS

We already have the "heart of awakening" (we can also say the Four Bodies of Awakening[11]), but it is not presently actualized. It remains in a latent state covered by various karmic veils. It is, therefore, necessary to uncover it to reveal it as it is.

The empowerment's function is to open a process that will allow us to purify the veils and to "awaken" the four Bodies, in order for them to go from a virtual state to a real state.

An empowerment can only be conferred by a vajra-master (*vajracharya*) belonging to the Vajrayana tradition and possessing certain characteristics:

- Having received the deity empowerment that he or she is ready to transmit to others
- This empowerment must have been transmitted up to the master by an unbroken lineage
- He or she must have accomplished the deity practice.

The empowerment itself is represented in the form of a ritual with visualizations, recitation of mantras, the accomplishment of mudras, and the use of various objects.

An empowerment can be given to a large group of people (as is the case for Tara) with only the condition that everyone has taken refuge and wishes to receive the empowerment, or it can be given to small groups, even a single individual.

TARA EMPOWERMENT

For the same deity, there are various empowerments that correspond to various lineages, tantras, or levels of practice. For Tara, there is an external practice, an inner practice, and a secret practice each requiring an empowerment.

The Tara empowerment bestowed in public is that of the external practice belonging to the Kriya Tantra. It is comprised of a ritual called, strictly speaking, "permission," which is divided into three parts: permission of the Body (of the deity), permission of the Speech, and permission of the Mind.

- By permission of the Body of the deity, the disciple is purified of faults and veils of the body (that is, that which results from negative acts done with the body). The disciple is then allowed to meditate on the body of the deity, notably visualizing himself or herself in the form of Tara. Ritually, permission of the Body is conferred, besides various visualizations, through the ritual vase (Tibetan, *bumpa*) placed on the disciple's head and from which he or she receives a few water drops to drink in the hollow of the hand.
- By permission of the Speech of the deity, the disciple is purified of the veils and faults of speech. He or she is allowed to recite Tara's mantra. Ritually, the permission of Speech is conferred by repeating the mantra, for which a mala is the support.
- By permission of the Mind of the deity, the disciple is purified of faults and veils of the mind. This permission is conferred by a representation of the lotus that Tara holds in her hand. It allows those who

receive it to absorb their minds in the contemplation (*samadhi*) of the deity.

Given that these three steps give the disciple the "power" (Tibetan, *wang*) to visualize the deity, to recite her mantra, and to accomplish her contemplation, the ritual is called "transmission of power" (Tibetan, *wang kur*), an expression with which an empowerment is designated in Tibetan.

Tara's other empowerments, especially those belonging to the higher tantras, can be presented in a slightly different way and possess a more complex structure.

Question: The permission of the mind allows the disciple to "absorb his or her mind in the contemplation of the deity." What does "contemplation" mean in this context?
Answer: The contemplation of the deity applies to the different meditations:
- on the one hand, the activity of the mind that clearly imagines the deity's body, clothes, ornaments, attributes, and seed syllable in the heart is a contemplation.
- on the other hand and mainly, the contemplation means remaining in a state where our own mind and the deity's mind are inseparable, in a natural state, without mental construction, and free of distractions. It is then equivalent to the Mahamudra meditation.

Question: For Avalokiteshvara (Tibetan, Chenrezig), it is possible to recite the mantra even without having received the empowerment. Is it the same for Tara?
Answer: In the higher tantras, it is not allowed to meditate on the deity's body or recite the mantra for those who have not first received the empowerment.

However, for deities like Avalokiteshvara or Tara, who represent above all the buddha's activity, we consider that, even if one has not received the empowerment and as long as one feels devotion to these deities, one can pray to them and recite their mantras. This is beneficial. However, the effect will be greater when one has received the empowerment.

4– The Praise

NOTES ON THE TRANSLATION OF THE PRAISE

The *Praise to the Twenty-one Taras* is a prayer most used in Tara Practice. It was rare for any Tibetan not to know it by heart. Simple illiterate farmers recited it as often as monks in the monasteries.

The praise is extracted from a Tara Tantra, and we saw earlier how the tantras are difficult texts to understand, are elliptic, often encrypted, and objects of multiple interpretations. The text of the Praise as it appears in Tibetan is practically incomprehensible without the help of a commentary. Given that many commentaries do not always have the same interpretation for selected passages, several translations are possible. The translation that we offer here is founded on Taranatha's commentary. Bokar Rinpoche's explanation of the praise does not imply, therefore, that other translations referring to other commentaries are erroneous any more than other translations should make people consider that the present translation is inaccurate.

A complete translation of the Praise word by word would be almost impossible to read, not only because it would have to respect a syntax evasive to a level of abstraction but also because the style would be heavy, littered with adverbs such as "completely," "entirely," "perfectly," and so on. These modifiers abound in Tibetan. Their function, we must say, is to serve more as a way to fill-in syllables to complete a line than to give meaning. We have tried to make the translation as faithful and accurate as seems possible for us, seeking to preserve the harmony of the language without which the notion of praise itself—that implies an idea of offering of words—would lose some of its value.

We did not attempt to translate the praise in a way that would make the meaning of the text more explicit. We have kept the elliptical style of the original text in some expressions, and our translation finds itself, from time to time, as enigmatic as the text. It is up to the commentary to unveil the mystery.

༄། །ཨོཾ་རྗེ་བཙུན་མ་འཕགས་མ་སྒྲོལ་མ་ལ་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ།
།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ཏཱ་རེ་མྱུར་མ་དཔའ་མོ།
།ཏུཏྟཱ་ར་ཡིས་འཇིགས་པ་སེལ་མ།
།ཏུ་རེས་དོན་ཀུན་སྦྱིན་པའི་སྒྲོལ་མ།
།སྭཱ་ཧཱའི་ཡི་གེ་ཁྱོད་ལ་འདུད་དོ།

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་སྒྲོལ་མ་མྱུར་མ་དཔའ་མོ།
།སྤྱན་ནི་སྐད་ཅིག་གློག་དང་འདྲ་མ།
།འཇིག་རྟེན་གསུམ་མགོན་ཆུ་སྐྱེས་ཞལ་གྱི།
།གེ་སར་བྱེ་བ་ལས་ནི་བྱུང་མ།

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་སྟོན་ཀའི་ཟླ་བ་ཀུན་ཏུ།
།གང་བ་བརྒྱ་ནི་བརྩེགས་པའི་ཞལ་མ།
།སྐར་མ་སྟོང་ཕྲག་ཚོགས་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས།
།རབ་ཏུ་ཕྱེ་བའི་འོད་རབ་འབར་མ།

ཕྱག་འཚལ་གསེར་སྔོ་ཆུ་ནས་སྐྱེས་ཀྱི།
།པདྨས་ཕྱག་ནི་རྣམ་པར་བརྒྱན་མ།
།སྦྱིན་པ་བརྩོན་འགྲུས་དཀའ་ཐུབ་ཞི་བ།
།བཟོད་པ་བསམ་གཏན་སྤྱོད་ཡུལ་ཉིད་མ།

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པའི་གཙུག་ཏོར།
།མཐའ་ཡས་རྣམ་པར་རྒྱལ་བར་སྤྱོད་མ།
།མ་ལུས་ཕ་རོལ་ཕྱིན་པ་ཐོབ་པའི།
།རྒྱལ་བའི་སྲས་ཀྱིས་ཤིན་ཏུ་བསྟེན་མ།

OM, homage to the sovereign, the noble, the liberating one.
Homage to TARE, the swift, the courageous one.
In front of you, who with TUTTARA dissipates all fears,
In front of you, who with TURE provides all benefits,
In front of you, SOHA, I bow down.

Homage to the liberating one, swift and courageous,
Whose sight is like instant lightning,
Who arises from myriads of stamens
Of the lotus face of the Protector of the three worlds.

Homage to her whose face gathers
One hundred autumn full moons,
Who blazes with the sparkling light
Of a thousand stars.

Homage to her whose hand is adorned
With a blue and gold water-born lotus,
Who has for her domain giving, effort,
Asceticism, peace, patience, and concentration.

Homage to the Crown of the Blessed One,
To her who enjoys the infinite and victory,
Who is trusted by the Children of the Conquerors
Who have achieved all perfections.

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ཏུཏྟཱ་ར་ཧཱུྃ་ཡི་གེས།
།འདོད་དང་ཕྱོགས་དང་ནམ་མཁའ་གང་མ།
།འཇིག་རྟེན་བདུན་པོ་ཞབས་ཀྱིས་མནན་ཏེ།
།ལུས་པ་མེད་པར་འགུགས་པར་ནུས་མ།

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་བརྒྱ་བྱིན་མེ་ལྷ་ཚངས་པ།
།རླུང་ལྷ་སྣ་ཚོགས་དབང་ཕྱུག་མཆོད་མ།
།འབྱུང་པོ་རོ་ལངས་དྲི་ཟ་རྣམས་དང་།
།གནོད་སྦྱིན་ཚོགས་ཀྱིས་མདུན་ནས་བསྟོད་མ།

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ཏྲཊ་ཅེས་བྱ་དང་ཕཊ་ཀྱིས།
།ཕ་རོལ་འཁྲུལ་འཁོར་རབ་ཏུ་འཇོམས་མ།
།གཡས་བསྐུམས་གཡོན་བརྐྱང་ཞབས་ཀྱིས་མནན་ཏེ།
།མེ་འབར་འཁྲུགས་པ་ཤིན་ཏུ་བར་མ།

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ཏུ་རེ་འཇིགས་པ་ཆེན་མོ།
།བདུད་ཀྱི་དཔའ་བོ་རྣམ་པར་འཇོམས་མ།
།ཆུ་སྐྱེས་ཞལ་ནི་ཁྲོ་གཉེར་ལྡན་མཛད།
།དགྲ་བོ་ཐམས་ཅད་མ་ལུས་གསོད་མ།

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་དཀོན་མཆོག་གསུམ་མཚོན་ཕྱག་རྒྱའི།
།སོར་མོས་ཐུགས་ཀར་རྣམ་པར་བརྒྱན་མ།
།མ་ལུས་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོས་བརྒྱན་པའི།
།རང་གི་འོད་ཀྱི་ཚོགས་རྣམས་འཁྲུག་མ།

Homage to her who fills the desire, sky, and directions,
With the syllables TUTTARA and HUNG
Who stamps the seven worlds with her feet,
Who possesses the power to summon them.

Homage to her who is honored by Indra, Agni, Brahma,
Vayu and other gods,
Who is praised by spirits, blood drinking spirits, celestial spirits, and local deities.

Homage to her who with TRAT and P'AT,
Destroys adverse machinations,
Who, stamping with her foot, right leg folded, left extended,
Blazes within a glowing fire.

Homage to TURE, the very frightful,
Who has complete victory over the demon's warriors,
Who kills all the enemies
By frowning her lotus face.

Homage to her whose fingers in the mudra symbol
Of the Three Jewels adorn the heart,
Who by radiating the rays of her own light,
Adorns the wheel of all directions.

Homage to perfect joy, to her whose sparkling tiara
Spreads garlands of light,
Who with great laughter and TUTTARA
Subjugates demons and their worlds.

Homage to her who has the power to summon
The hosts of the guardians of earth,
Who delivers from all misfortune
With HUNG and moving her frowning forehead.

Homage to her whose tiara is a moon crescent,
Ablaze with all adornments,
Who unceasingly spreads the light
From Amitabha sitting in her full hair.

Homage to her who dwells amid garlands
Blazing like the fire at the end of time
Whose right leg extended and left folded,
Swirling, gives joy and destroys the horde of enemies.

Homage to her who strikes the ground with the palm of
her hand
And stamps it with her foot,
Who frowning her eyebrows, with the syllable HUNG
Shatters the seven underground levels.

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་བདེ་མ་དགེ་མ་ཞི་མ།
།མྱ་ངན་འདས་ཞི་སྤྱོད་ཡུལ་ཉིད་མ།
།སྭཱ་ཧཱ་ཨོཾ་དང་ཡང་དག་ལྡན་པས།
།སྡིག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་འཇོམས་པ་ཉིད་མ།

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ཀུན་ནས་བསྐོར་རབ་དགའ་བའི།
།དགྲ་ཡི་ལུས་ནི་རབ་ཏུ་འགེམས་མ།
།ཡི་གེ་བཅུ་པའི་ངག་ནི་བཀོད་པའི།
།རིག་པ་ཧཱུྃ་ལས་སྒྲོལ་མ་ཉིད་མ།

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ཏུ་རེའི་ཞབས་ནི་བརྡབས་པས།
།ཧཱུྃ་གི་རྣམ་པའི་ས་བོན་ཉིད་མ།
།རི་རབ་མནྡ་ར་དང་འབིགས་བྱེད།
།འཇིག་རྟེན་གསུམ་རྣམས་གཡོ་བ་ཉིད་མ།

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལྷ་ཡི་མཚོ་ཡི་རྣམ་པའི།
།རི་དྭགས་རྟགས་ཅན་ཕྱག་ན་བསྣམས་མ།
།ཏཱ་ར་གཉིས་བརྗོད་ཕཊ་ཀྱི་ཡི་གེས།
།དུག་རྣམས་མ་ལུས་པར་ནི་སེལ་མ།

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལྷ་ཡི་ཚོགས་རྣམས་རྒྱལ་པོ།
།ལྷ་དང་མིའམ་ཅི་ཡིས་བསྟེན་མ།
།ཀུན་ནས་གོ་ཆ་དགའ་བའི་བརྗིད་ཀྱིས།
།རྩོད་དང་རྨི་ལམ་ངན་པ་སེལ་མ།

Homage to her who is happiness, virtue, and peace
who lives in peace beyond suffering,
Who conquers the greatly harmful deeds
With the purity of SOHA and OM.

Homage to her who completely delights her entourage
Who destroys the bodies of enemies,
To the liberating one coming from the mantric HUNG
Who emits the utterance of the ten syllables.

Homage to TURE who stamps with her foot,
To whom HUNG is the seed syllable,
Who shakes Mount Meru, Mandara,
Kailash, and the three worlds.

Homage to her who holds in her hand the hare-marked
moon
In the form of the gods' lake
Who totally dispels poison
By reciting twice TARA and P'AT.

Homage to her who is honored by hosts of gods, kings,
Gods, and horse-headed beings,
Who dispels conflicts and bad dreams
With her armor of resplendent joy.

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ཉི་མ་ཟླ་བ་རྒྱས་པའི།
།སྤྱན་གཉིས་པོ་ལ་འོད་རབ་གསལ་མ།
།ཧ་ར་གཉིས་བརྗོད་ཏུཏྟ་ར་ཡིས།
།ཤིན་ཏུ་དྲག་པོའི་རིམས་ནད་སེལ་མ།

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་དེ་ཉིད་གསུམ་རྣམས་བཀོད་པས།
།ཞི་བའི་མཐུ་དང་ཡང་དག་ལྡན་མ།
།གདོན་དང་རོ་ལངས་གནོད་སྦྱིན་ཚོགས་རྣམས།
།འཇོམས་པ་ཏུ་རེ་རབ་མཆོག་ཉིད་མ།

།རྩ་བའི་སྔགས་ཀྱི་བསྟོད་པ་འདི་དང་།
།ཕྱག་འཚལ་བ་ནི་ཉི་ཤུ་རྩ་གཅིག།

Homage to her whose two eyes shine
With the radiance of the sun and moon
Who dispels virulent epidemics
With two HARA and with TUTTARA.

Homage to her who through the three established principles
Fully possesses the power of pacifying
To TURE, the sublime, victor
Of the spirits, blood drinking spirits, and local deities.

Such are the praise of the root mantra
and the twenty-one-fold homage.

ORIGIN OF THE PRAISE

The Tara Praise, called the Praise of the Twenty-One-Fold Homage is not a text of human origin. It is contained in a tantra called The Seven Hundred Thoughts, The King of the Tara Tantra.[12]

We saw earlier that tantras dwell in the omniscience of the mind of the buddhas beyond all time and manifestation and that they were revealed in an epoch when it was necessary. The tantra containing the praise is said to have been uttered by Vairochana Buddha, not that he uttered it with his mouth but he emitted it from his crown protuberance.[13]

First written in Sanskrit, the praise was later translated into Tibetan, and, with the tantra containing it formed a part of the Kangyur, the Tibetan collection of canonical texts gathering the words of the Buddha.

Many commentaries have been written to elucidate the meaning of the praise, which would remain practically incomprehensible without them. Having various points of view, these commentaries offer very different interpretations. We follow Taranatha's commentary here.

A great scholar, famous for his knowledge of Sanskrit—he wrote a grammar for the use of Tibetans—Taranatha lived in the 17th century (1575-1638). He himself did not go to India but studied with four great Indian scholars whom he hosted in his monastery. He was seen as having reincarnated in India in many past lives as a scholar. The tendencies thus left in his mind explain the ease with which he studied Sanskrit.

His written works were prolific. He notably translated tantras, devoted many works to Tara, and wrote many treatises on Kalachakra, to which the lineage he headed (Jonang lineage) gave much importance.

HOW TO RECITE THE PRAISE

The praise addressed to Tara is based on the recognition of Tara's greatness. Tara is in essence, Prajnaparamita, the origin or "Mother" of all the buddhas. She also gathered into herself the activity of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. The quality of her body, speech, and mind are infinite. Therefore, she is worthy of the praise.

When we recite the praise, we think that we produce an infinite number of bodies similar to ourselves who all together prostrate and recite the text. Our mind, in an attitude of great reverence and profound confidence, prays for the deity to protect us from all suffering and all fears of samsara and to fulfill our request. As for our speech, during recitation of the text, we think of all the pleasant sounds in the universe accompanying it.

The recitation of the praise requires intense devotion, a total trust in Tara that we pray from the bottom of our heart with the request, "Protect us!"

We receive thus the blessing that purifies us, makes us accumulate merit, protects us, and helps us obtain what we wish.

EXPLANATION OF THE PRAISE

Preliminary Stanza

༄། །ཨོཾ་རྗེ་བཙུན་མ་འཕགས་མ་སྒྲོལ་མ་ལ་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ།
།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ཏཱ་རེ་མྱུར་མ་དཔའ་མོ།
།ཏུཏྟཱ་ར་ཡིས་འཇིགས་པ་སེལ་མ།
།ཏུ་རེས་དོན་ཀུན་སྦྱིན་པའི་སྒྲོལ་མ།
།སྭཱཧཱའི་ཡི་གེ།ཁྱོད་ལ་འདུད་དོ།

OM, HOMAGE TO THE SOVEREIGN, THE NOBLE, THE LIBERATING ONE.
HOMAGE TO TARE, THE SWIFT, THE COURAGEOUS ONE.
IN FRONT OF YOU, WHO WITH TUTTARA DISSIPATES ALL FEARS,
IN FRONT OF YOU, WHO WITH TURE PROVIDES ALL BENEFITS,
IN FRONT OF YOU, SOHA, I BOW DOWN.

This stanza is not part of the tantra. Added later, it is not considered to be one of the 21 stanzas of the praise. As it includes Tara's mantra OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA, it is sometimes called the "praise of the mantra." Its meaning is as follows.

- OM comes at the beginning of the sentence because it is the initial syllable of the Tara mantra.
- SOVEREIGN: In Tibetan it is two syllables (*je-tsun*). The first syllable means "sovereign" and the second "queen," each possessing some implications.

– Sovereign means that we address Tara as the main figure of all the places of refuge.

– Queen means here "stained with no defects."

- NOBLE, she is superior to all temporal appearances and beings in samsara.

- LIBERATING ONE, by her activity, she frees all samsaric beings from their suffering and establishes them in happiness. Liberating one is also the meaning of the word Tara.
- TARE, part of the mantra repeating the name of the deity.
- SWIFT, moved by great compassion, Tara, when she comes to help beings, does it without procrastinating or delay.
- COURAGEOUS: Tara shows limitless courage with no weakness to protect beings from suffering, whether in a temporal or ultimate way.
- TUTTARA, part of the mantra.
- YOU WHO DISSIPATE ALL FEARS: by protecting them, Tara eliminates the fears of beings in samsara.
- TURE, part of the mantra.
- YOU WHO PROVIDE ALL BENEFITS: Tara bestows all benefits, whether temporal or ultimate.
- SOHA, final part of the mantra
- I BOW DOWN, I pay homage with body, speech, and mind.

Stanza 1

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་སྒྲོལ་མ་མྱུར་མ་དཔའ་མོ།
།སྤྱན་ནི་སྐད་ཅིག་གློག་དང་འདྲ་མ།
།འཇིག་རྟེན་གསུམ་མགོན་ཆུ་སྐྱེས་ཞལ་གྱི།
།གེ་སར་བྱེ་བ་ལས་ནི་བྱུང་མ།

HOMAGE TO THE LIBERATING ONE, SWIFT AND COURAGEOUS,
WHOSE SIGHT IS LIKE INSTANT LIGHTNING,
WHO ARISES FROM MYRIADS OF STAMENS
OF THE LOTUS FACE OF THE PROTECTOR OF THE THREE WORLDS.

This stanza shows that Tara is worth praising because she has the three qualities of an awakened mind: love, power, and knowledge.

- SWIFT, the fact that she swiftly accomplishes the benefit of beings with compassion is first the sign of her love.
- COURAGEOUS, her absence of fear and weakness in protecting beings from all dangers attests to her power.
- SIGHT LIKE INSTANT LIGHTNING, Tara has the sight (eye) of primordial knowledge; this knowledge, instantaneous as lightning, gives her the capabilities to see and understand all phenomena.
- LIBERATING ONE: because of this love, this power, and knowledge, Tara liberates beings from the suffering of samsara and establishes them in happiness. Therefore, she is called the "liberating one."

The two following lines refer to Tara's origin from a relative point of view.

- PROTECTOR OF THE THREE WORLDS designates Avalokiteshvara (Chenrezig). The three worlds that he watches over are underground, on earth, and above earth existence, that is, all classes of beings.
- LOTUS FACE, the lotus (literally, born of water) indicates the beauty; the metaphor underlines the beauty of Avalokiteshvara's face.
- MYRIADS OF STAMENS: continues the metaphor.

These two lines also make allusion to the story in which Tara would have appeared from a tear drop of Avalokiteshvara. Beyond this literal meaning, Taranatha also gives an interpretation on the level of ultimate truth. In this case, the Protector of the Three Worlds designates the Absolute Body (Dharmakaya), and Tara represents the formal body (rupakaya) issued from the dynamics of the Absolute Body.

Stanza 2

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་སྟོན་ཀའི་ཟླ་བ་ཀུན་ཏུ།
།གང་བ་བརྒྱ་ནི་བརྩེགས་པའི་ཞལ་མ།
།སྐར་མ་སྟོང་ཕྲག་ཚོགས་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས།
།རབ་ཏུ་ཕྱེ་བའི་འོད་རབ་འབར་མ།

HOMAGE TO HER WHOSE FACE GATHERS
ONE HUNDRED AUTUMN FULL MOONS,
WHO BLAZES WITH THE SPARKLING LIGHT
OF A THOUSAND STARS.

- SHE WHOSE FACE GATHERS ONE HUNDRED AUTUMN FULL MOONS: the luminosity of Tara's face is comparable to the full radiance of one hundred autumn full moons. In India, the autumn moon especially glistens in the night, whereas in summer (rainy season), the sky is obscured by clouds and humidity. In winter, it is lightly veiled by dust floating in the air. In autumn, the sky is extremely limpid.
- SHE WHO BLAZES WITH SPARKLING LIGHT OF A THOUSAND STARS: while the two previous lines praise the luminosity of Tara's face, it is now to the glitter of Tara's body that the stars' light alludes.

Stanza 3

ཕྱག་འཚལ་གསེར་སྔོ་ཆུ་ནས་སྐྱེས་ཀྱི།
།པདྨས་ཕྱག་ནི་རྣམ་པར་བརྒྱན་མ།
།སྦྱིན་པ་བརྩོན་འགྲུས་དཀའ་ཐུབ་ཞི་བ།
།བཟོད་པ་བསམ་གཏན་སྤྱོད་ཡུལ་ཉིད་མ།

HOMAGE TO HER WHOSE HAND IS ADORNED
WITH A BLUE AND GOLD WATER-BORN LOTUS,
WHO HAS FOR HER DOMAIN GIVING, EFFORT,
ASCETICISM, PEACE, PATIENCE, AND CONCENTRATION.

- A BLUE AND GOLD WATER-BORN LOTUS: water-born is a metaphor for the lotus; here the stem is gold colored while the flower is blue.

The two following lines indicate that Tara possesses the six paramitas perfectly, the six perfections of the bodhisattvas.

- GIVING: paramita of generosity
- EFFORT: paramita of effort or diligence
- ASCETICISM: designates here the paramita of ethics
- PEACE: refers to the paramita of wisdom (prajnaparamita)
- PATIENCE: paramita of patience
- CONCENTRATION: paramita of concentration

Stanza 4

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པའི་གཙུག་ཏོར།
།མཐའ་ཡས་རྣམ་པར་རྒྱལ་བ་སྤྱོད་མ།
།མ་ལུས་ཕ་རོལ་ཕྱིན་པ་ཐོབ་པའི།
།རྒྱལ་བའི་སྲས་གྱིས་ཤིན་ཏུ་བསྟེན་མ།

HOMAGE TO THE CROWN OF THE BLESSED ONE,
TO HER WHO ENJOYS THE INFINITE AND VICTORY,
WHO IS TRUSTED BY THE CHILDREN OF THE CONQUERORS
WHO HAVE ACHIEVED ALL PERFECTIONS.

- THE CROWN OF THE BLESSED ONE: it is said that Tara's praise was uttered by the Buddha (Blessed One) Vairochana, not from his mouth but from the crown protuberance on the top of his head, as with that of all buddhas. The Crown of the Blessed One designates the crown protuberance as well as metaphorically the praise that comes from it and the one who is the subject of the praise, Tara.
- THE INFINITE: the infinite refers to benefits proceeding from the praise. When we recite it, Tara effectively grants us all that we ask of her.
- VICTORY: the praise wins the same complete victory over all adverse circumstances wherever they happen. Whereas infinite benefits are related to the gift of what we wish, the victory is related to the help Tara brings us to overcome fear and danger.

Taranatha's commentary explicates the first two lines of this stanza in the following way: "Homage to [her who holds the mantra coming from] the Crown of the Blessed One [Vairochana], to her who enjoys the infinite [of the benefits] and victory [brought by the mantra on all adverse circumstances]." Taranatha uses the term "mantra" here but it seems that it is to designate the praise and not the mantra itself.

• THE CHILDREN OF THE CONQUERORS: they are the bodhisattvas of the tenth stages, called the Children of the Buddhas (Conquerors).

• ALL PERFECTIONS: designates the ten paramitas, that is, the six paramitas we have seen in the previous stanza (giving, ethics, patience, effort, concentration, and wisdom) to which are added:

- paramita of skillful means
- paramita of wishes
- paramita of power
- paramita of pristine knowledge (*jnana*)

Stanza 5

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ཏུཏྟཱ་ར་ཧཱུྃ་ཡི་གེས།
།འདོད་དང་ཕྱོགས་དང་ནམ་མཁའ་གང་མ།
།འཇིག་རྟེན་བདུན་པོ་ཞབས་ཀྱིས་མནན་ཏེ།
།ལུས་པ་མེད་པར་འགུགས་པར་ནུས་མ།

HOMAGE TO HER WHO FILLS THE DESIRE, SKY, AND DIRECTIONS,
WITH THE SYLLABLES TUTTARA AND HUNG
WHO STAMPS THE SEVEN WORLDS WITH HER FEET,
WHO POSSESSES THE POWER TO SUMMON THEM.

• TUTTARA AND HUNG: mantras used by Tara to accomplish the activity mentioned in the stanza.

• DESIRE: sphere of desire. Buddhist cosmology divides the possibilities of existence into three spheres or domains, that is, the sphere of desire (hells, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings, demi-gods, and some categories of gods), the sphere of form (other categories of gods in more subtle levels), the sphere of formless (other categories of gods in even more subtle levels). "Desire" designates the first of these three spheres.

- THE SKY: comprises form and formless spheres. Desire and sky refer to the particular universe in which we live, our solar system as we would say today.
- DIRECTIONS: in infinite space, an infinite number of universes evolves, each comprising a desire sphere, a form sphere, and formless sphere (therefore there are many solar systems). Tara's activity occurs in the ten directions (four cardinal points, four intermediate points, zenith, and nadir) and applies to all the universes, not just ours.
- THE SEVEN WORLDS: seven levels of existence inhabited by seven classes of beings

– nagas: spirits of water and earth currents
– pretas: (hungry ghosts) classes of beings who are always starving
– asuras: (demi-gods) powerful, proud, and quarrelsome beings
– human beings
– vidhyadharas (knowledge holders): designates here, it seems, the individuals who, after having developed psychic powers (yogic powers) live in nonhuman levels, nonetheless without having attained liberation
– kinnara: beings with a human body and a horse's head
– devas: gods of the three spheres (desire, form, and formless)

- STAMPS AND POSSESSES THE POWER TO SUMMON THEM: metaphors signifying that in her might, Tara can easily exert her influence on the seven worlds. She can summon these beings and cover them with her compassionate activity: to ward off the negative activity they endure, liberate them from suffering, and establish them in happiness.

Stanza 6

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་བརྒྱ་བྱིན་མེ་ལྷ་ཚངས་པ།
།རླུང་ལྷ་སྣ་ཚོགས་དབང་ཕྱུག་མཆོད་མ།
།འབྱུང་པོ་རོ་ལངས་དྲི་ཟ་རྣམས་དང་།
།གནོད་སྦྱིན་ཚོགས་ཀྱིས་མདུན་ནས་བསྟོད་མ།

HOMAGE TO HER WHO IS HONORED BY INDRA, AGNI, BRAHMA, VAYU AND OTHER GODS,
WHO IS PRAISED BY SPIRITS, BLOOD DRINKING SPIRITS, CELESTIAL SPIRITS, AND LOCAL DEITIES.

The first two lines underline Tara's greatness by stating the honors given to her by the great gods of Vedic India.

- INDRA: King of the gods
- AGNI: Fire god who reigns over the rishis
- BRAHMA: creator of the universe
- VAYU: wind god, protector of works and the arts
- OTHER GODS: other vedic gods

The two last lines refer to homage paid by other classes of beings usually opposed to the dharma and who live in the realms of the asuras or pretas.

- SPIRITS: some beings called in Sanskrit rakshasa

- BLOOD DRINKING SPIRITS: spirits having invaded a corpse and feeding on human blood
- CELESTIAL SPIRITS: musician spirits eating scents (Sanskrit, gandharva)
- LOCAL DEITIES: classes of beings (Sanskrit, yaksha) governed by Vairavana (Namthose)

Stanza 7

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ཏྲཊ་ཅེས་བྱ་དང་ཕཊ་ཀྱིས།
།ཕ་རོལ་འཁྲུལ་འཁོར་རབ་ཏུ་འཇོམས་མ།
།གཡས་བསྐུམས་གཡོན་བརྐྱང་ཞབས་ཀྱིས་མནན་ཏེ།
།མེ་འབར་འཁྲུགས་པ་ཤིན་ཏུ་བར་མ།

HOMAGE TO HER WHO WITH TRAT AND P'AT,
DESTROYS ADVERSE MACHINATIONS,
WHO, STAMPING WITH HER FOOT, RIGHT LEG FOLDED, LEFT EXTENDED,
BLAZES WITHIN A GLOWING FIRE.

- TRAT and P'AT: syllables used by Tara to accomplish the activity mentioned in this stanza (Tibetans say "tray" and "pay"). These two syllables are associated with violent activity.
- ADVERSE MACHINATIONS: enemies are those who seek to harm individuals or the dharma by using various methods such as weapons, poisons, mantras, and so on. Tara has the power to overcome all their machinations.
- STAMPING WITH HER FOOT, right leg folded, left leg extended: to overcome the enemies, Tara not only uses mantras TRAT and P'AT but she takes a posture called wrathful. Standing on her left foot, she steps on

negative spirits to subdue them, right leg folded and left leg extended.

- BLAZES WITHIN A GLOWING FIRE: Tara's body is blazing and produces immense flames. This fire first forces Yama (god of death) and all those who could harm our lives to flee away; secondly, the fire surrounds us with protection.

Stanza 8

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ཏུ་རེ་འཇིགས་པ་ཆེན་མོ།
།བདུད་ཀྱི་དཔའ་བོ་རྣམ་པར་འཇོམས་མ།
།ཆུ་སྐྱེས་ཞལ་ནི་ཁྲོ་གཉེར་ལྡན་མཛད།
།དགྲ་བོ་ཐམས་ཅད་མ་ལུས་གསོད་མ།

HOMAGE TO TURE, THE VERY FRIGHTFUL,
WHO HAS COMPLETE VICTORY OVER THE DEMON'S WARRIORS,
WHO KILLS ALL THE ENEMIES
BY FROWNING HER LOTUS FACE.

- TURE: in Sanskrit, swift, Tara's attribute; also designates a part of the mantra; Tara uses the power of this part to exert her activity.
- THE VERY FRIGHTFUL: Tara's nature is to be at peace. However, when circumstances demand it, she can take on a wrathful and violent aspect, capable of causing fright.
- DEMON'S WARRIORS: those who oppose the virtuous activity and dharma practice, and those who propagate present suffering and causes for future suffering.

- WHO HAS COMPLETE VICTORY: it is with her wrathful attitude that Tara vanquishes the demon's warriors, since a peaceful attitude would not subdue them.
- BY FROWNING HER LOTUS FACE: the preceding lines meant that Tara's body has taken on a wrathful expression. The fourth line specifies that this expression appears to her face, to the point of wrinkling it.
- WHO KILLS ALL THE ENEMIES: enemies are those previously designated with the expression "demon's warriors," those who engage in unwholesome activity and become obstacles to the dharma. When Tara "kills" them, this means that she deprives them physically and mentally of their harmful power.

Taranatha gives a second interpretation for this stanza, no longer considering outer enemies but inner enemies.

- THE VERY FRIGHTENING: primordial awareness, union of bliss and emptiness, frightening for unfortunate beings.
- TURE: threading swiftly the higher paths, we attain buddhahood.
- THE DEMON'S WARRIORS: conflicting emotions (desire, hatred, jealousy, and so on) and the thoughts stemming from them.
- FROWNING HER FACE: here, symbolizes the creation phase of deity meditation, that is, the moment when the practitioner imagines himself or herself in the form of the deity and develops "divine pride." This divine pride vanquishes conflicting emotions and allows us ultimately to obtain the Wisdom Body, bliss-emptiness, a term used in the tantras as an equivalent of the Absolute Body.

- ENEMIES: the veils of the mind, conquered by primordial wisdom. These veils are:

– The veil of conflicting emotions that disappears at the first stage of the bodhisattva.

– The veil of dualistic knowledge that begins to disappear at the first stage and is completely eliminated with attaining buddhahood.

Stanza 9

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་དཀོན་མཆོག་གསུམ་མཚོན་ཕྱག་རྒྱའི།
།སོར་མོས་ཐུགས་ཀར་རྣམ་པར་བརྒྱན་མ།
།མ་ལུས་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་བརྒྱན་པའི།
།རང་གི་འོད་ཀྱི་ཚོགས་རྣམས་འཁྲུག་མ།

HOMAGE TO HER WHOSE FINGERS IN THE MUDRA SYMBOL
OF THE THREE JEWELS ADORN THE HEART,
WHO BY RADIATING THE RAYS OF HER OWN LIGHT,
ADORNS THE WHEEL OF ALL DIRECTIONS.

- MUDRA SYMBOL OF THE THREE JEWELS: Tara, as she is usually represented, with the left hand holding a lotus stem accomplishes a mudra called "mudra of the Three Jewels" (The Three Jewels being the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha). The mudra symbol of the Three Jewels mentioned here, according to Taranatha, is completely different. Hands are joined at heart level, the middle fingers pressing each other, the other slightly folded fingers touch each other at their extremities. Together, they form a lotus bud that symbolizes the Three Jewels, but in reality is called "lotus mudra."

- ADORN THE HEART: The previously described mudra requires that the hands be placed in front of the heart.
- BY RADIATING THE RAYS OF HER OWN LIGHT: After Tara places her hands in the lotus mudra, her entire body radiates infinite rays of light.
- ADORNS: Light radiated by Tara's body illuminates and beautifies the universe while spreading outward.
- THE WHEEL OF ALL DIRECTIONS: designates all the universes spread throughout the immensity of space. It is said that a long time ago, Tara performed the lotus mudra, consecrated it with her mantra, and declared that anyone who accomplishes it will immediately invoke her presence. The light with which Tara fills the universe represents her spontaneous arrival when one of her followers calls upon her with the mantra.[14]

Stanza 10

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་རབ་ཏུ་དགའ་བ་བརྗེད་པའི།
།དབུ་རྒྱན་འོད་ཀྱི་ཕྲེང་བ་སྤེལ་མ།
།བཞད་པ་རབ་བཞད་ཏུཏྟ་ར་ཡིས།
།བདུད་དང་འཇིག་རྟེན་དབང་ཏུ་མཛད་མ།

HOMAGE TO PERFECT JOY, TO HER WHOSE SPARKLING TIARA
SPREADS GARLANDS OF LIGHT
WHO WITH GREAT LAUGHTER AND TUTTARA
SUBJUGATES DEMONS AND THEIR WORLDS.

- PERFECT JOY: Tara's body provides beings with perfect joy.
- SPARKLING: the various precious stones that make her tiara shine of their own radiance.

- SPREADS GARLANDS OF LIGHT: the luminous rays radiating from the tiara take the form of garlands that multiply and propagate themselves.
- WITH GREAT LAUGHTER AND TUTTARA: to discipline demons, Tara uses her laughter and mantra.
- SUBJUGATES DEMONS AND THEIR WORLDS: Some worlds are ruled by demons or by temporal deities. Tara has the power to subdue them.

Stanza 11

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ས་གཞི་སྐྱོང་བའི་ཚོགས་རྣམས།
།ཐམས་ཅད་འགུགས་པར་ནུས་མ་ཉིད་མ།
།ཁྲོ་གཉེར་གཡོ་བའི་ཡི་གེ་ཧཱུྃ་གིས།
།ཕོངས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་རྣམ་པར་སྒྲོལ་མ།

HOMAGE TO HER WHO HAS THE POWER TO SUMMON
THE HOSTS OF THE GUARDIANS OF EARTH,
WHO DELIVERS FROM ALL MISFORTUNE
WITH HUNG AND MOVING HER FROWNING FOREHEAD.

- GUARDIANS OF THE EARTH: refers, first, to some deities called goddesses of the earth, and secondly to the kings ruling human beings.
- TO SUMMON: underlines Tara's greatness; all powerful beings obey her.
- WITH HUNG AND MOVING HER FROWNING FOREHEAD: signs of anger symbolizing Tara's force, able to brush away any misfortune.
- DELIVERS FROM ALL MISFORTUNE: misfortune as explained here is the "lack of happiness"; it encompasses all scarcity such as lack of food, clothing,

material belongings, or whatever, including lack of inner happiness. Tara frees beings from all suffering.

Stanza 12

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ཟླ་བའི་དུམ་བུའི་དབུ་བརྒྱན།
།བརྒྱན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཤིན་ཏུ་འབར་མ།
།རལ་པའི་ཁྲོད་ནས་འོད་དཔག་མེད་ལས།
།རྟག་པར་ཤིན་ཏུ་འོད་རབ་མཛད་མ།

HOMAGE TO HER WHOSE TIARA IS A MOON CRESCENT,
ABLAZE WITH ALL ADORNMENTS,
WHO UNCEASINGLY SPREADS THE LIGHT
FROM AMITABHA SITTING IN HER FULL HAIR.

The two first lines praise the tiara shaped in a moon crescent and the ornaments inlaid with precious stones adorning Tara's body and shining with a radiance that emanates in all directions.

- AMITABHA SITTING IN HER FULL HAIR: in the knot that gathers part of her hair on top of her head, there is Amitabha Buddha (whose name means Infinite Light) proclaiming that Tara belongs to the lotus family ruled by Amitabha.
- WHO UNCEASINGLY SPREADS THE LIGHT: Amitabha's body itself constantly radiates light that spreads all around Tara.

Stanza 13

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་བསྐལ་པ་ཐ་མའི་མེ་ལྟར།
།འབར་བའི་ཕྲེང་བའི་དབུས་ན་གནས་མ།
།གཡས་བརྐྱངས་གཡོན་བསྐུམས་ཀུན་ནས་བསྐོར་དགའ།
།དགྲ་ཡི་དཔུང་ནི་རྣམ་པར་འཇོམས་མ།

HOMAGE TO HER WHO DWELLS AMID GARLANDS
BLAZING LIKE THE FIRE AT THE END OF TIME,
WHO, RIGHT LEG EXTENDED AND LEFT FOLDED,
SWIRLING, GIVES JOY AND DESTROYS THE HORDE OF ENEMIES.

- THE FIRE AT THE END OF TIME: according to traditional cosmology, at the end of a kalpa (cosmic era) the world would be set ablaze, destroyed, and consumed by an immense fire.
- SWIRLING: Tara stands up. "Swirling" indicates the swift and various movements of her dance.
- RIGHT LEG EXTENDED, LEFT FOLDED: this does not mean that Tara holds a fixed posture. These are only examples of her leg movements during the dance.
- GIVES JOY: the effect of this dance is to provide joy to beneficent beings.
- DESTROYS THE HORDE OF ENEMIES: this is the second effect of the dance, destroying harmful human or nonhuman beings.[15]

Stanza 14

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ས་གཞིའི་ངོས་ལ་ཕྱག་གི།
།མཐིལ་གྱིས་བསྣུན་ཅིང་ཞབས་ཀྱིས་བརྡུང་མ།
།ཁྲོ་གཉེར་ཅན་མཛད་ཡི་གེ་ཧཱུྃ་གིས།
།རིམ་པ་བདུན་པོ་རྣམས་ནི་འགེམས་མ།

HOMAGE TO HER WHO STRIKES THE GROUND WITH THE PALM
OF HER HAND AND STAMPS IT WITH HER FOOT,
WHO FROWNING HER EYEBROWS, WITH THE SYLLABLE HUNG
SHATTERS THE SEVEN UNDERGROUND LEVELS.

• STRIKES THE GROUND WITH THE PALM OF HER HAND: the complete movement done by Tara is first to clap her hands, then, to strike the ground. The ground designates here the surface of the world in its totality. Tara demonstrates by this hand movement, as well as stamping the ground with her left foot, that she dominates the world.

• WITH THE SYLLABLE HUNG: Tara emits this syllable through her nose.

• THE SEVEN UNDERGROUND LEVELS: Taranatha's commentary gives the list of the seven underground worlds without specifying their characteristics. Generally, these are the nagas, ogres, and other creatures' dwellings. One may recall that in traditional cosmology, the Earth is a flat disc upon which the oceans and continents are placed. The seven levels are listed as follows:

– the base
– the superior base
– the baseless
– the base itself

– the base of vital essence
– the good base
– the pure base.

Stanza 15

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་བདེ་མ་དགེ་མ་ཞི་མ།
།མྱ་ངན་འདས་ཞི་སྤྱོད་ཡུལ་ཉིད་མ།
།སྭཱ་ཧཱ་ཨོཾ་དང་ཡང་དག་ལྡན་པས།
།སྡིག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་འཇོམས་པ་ཉིད་མ།

HOMAGE TO HER WHO IS HAPPINESS, VIRTUE, AND PEACE
WHO LIVES IN PEACE BEYOND SUFFERING,
WHO CONQUERS THE GREATLY HARMFUL DEEDS
WITH THE PURITY OF SOHA AND OM.

- HAPPINESS, VIRTUE, AND PEACE are permanent qualities of Tara and also qualities through which she helps beings.
  – she grants them happiness in this very life
  – she makes them accomplish virtues, that is, positive activity as the foundation of happiness for future lives.
  – to fortunate disciples, she shows the path to peace, that is, liberation.
- PEACE BEYOND SUFFERING: beyond suffering designates nirvana. As previously, not only has Tara attained this nirvana but she provides access to it for her followers. The "peace" of the previous line applied to the path to nirvana, whereas the "peace" of this second line refers to obtaining nirvana.
- SOHA and OM: mantras used by Tara.
- PURITY: these mantras are pure, that is, perfectly authentic. This explains their benefits.

- CONQUERS THE GREATLY HARMFUL DEEDS: by the mantras that she utters, Tara dissipates harmful deeds themselves and the suffering coming from them.

Other interpretations of the commentary refer to the five wisdoms according to the ultimate truth:

- HAPPINESS: discriminating wisdom
- VIRTUE: mirror-like wisdom
- PEACE: wisdom of equality
- PEACE BEYOND SUFFERING: dharmadatu wisdom
- CONQUERS THE GREATLY HARMFUL DEEDS: accomplishing wisdom
- SOHA AND OM: Tara's mind, possessing the five wisdoms, is endowed with a dynamic that manifests in the form of "fearless sound" or "sound of emptiness," which is the mantra. The deity's mantras, symbolized here by SOHA and OM, are the expression of the Absolute Body. The deity and her mantra are truly inseparable. The mantra OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA is none other than Tara.

Stanza 16

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ཀུན་ནས་བསྐོར་རབ་དགའ་བའི།
།དགྲ་ཡི་ལུས་ནི་རབ་ཏུ་འགེམས་མ།
།ཡི་གེ་བཅུ་པའི་ངག་ནི་བཀོད་པའི།
།རིག་པ་ཧཱུྃ་ལས་སྒྲོལ་མ་ཉིད་མ།

HOMAGE TO HER WHO COMPLETELY DELIGHTS HER ENTOURAGE
WHO DESTROYS THE BODIES OF ENEMIES,
TO THE LIBERATING ONE COMING FROM THE MANTRIC HUNG
WHO EMITS THE UTTERANCE OF THE TEN SYLLABLES.

• WHO COMPLETELY DELIGHTS HER ENTOURAGE: the natural effect of Tara's compassion is to provide joy for the bodhisattvas, the Vajrayana followers having attained realization, for the practitioners, and her followers in general. "Completely" means that her entourage is immense and goes out in all directions.[16]

• ENEMIES: those opposed to the practice of the dharma or also conflicting emotions in the mind of beings.

• HUNG: the seed syllable from which Tara appears in her wrathful form described here as blazing with light. (The seed syllable of Tara in her peaceful form is TAM.)

• THE UTTERANCE OF THE TEN SYLLABLES: Tara's mantra OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA is considered inseparable from Tara herself. From the seed syllable appears the mantra or the deity herself.

Stanza 17

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ཏུ་རེའི་ཞབས་ནི་བརྡབས་པས།
།ཧཱུྃ་གི་རྣམ་པའི་ས་བོན་ཉིད་མ།
།རི་རབ་མནྡ་ར་དང་འབིགས་བྱེད།
།འཇིག་རྟེན་གསུམ་རྣམས་གཡོ་བ་ཉིད་མ།

HOMAGE TO TURE WHO STAMPS WITH HER FOOT,
TO WHOM HUNG IS THE SEED SYLLABLE,
WHO SHAKES MOUNT MERU, MANDARA,
KAILASH, AND THE THREE WORLDS.

• TURE: Sanskrit term meaning "swift," one of Tara's names.

- STAMPS WITH HER FOOT: indicates that Tara dons a wrathful form here.
- MOUNT MERU: the mountain forming the central axis of the world in buddhist cosmology.
- MANDARA: a mountain.
- KAILASH: a sacred mountain in Western Tibet, looked upon as Chakrasamvara's dwelling by buddhists and as Shiva's dwelling by hindus.
- THE THREE WORLDS: on earth, underground, and above earth.

Stanza 18

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལྷ་ཡི་མཚོ་ཡི་རྣམ་པའི།
།རི་དྭགས་རྟགས་ཅན་ཕྱག་ན་བསྣམས་མ།
།ཏཱ་ར་གཉིས་བརྗོད་ཕཊ་ཀྱི་ཡི་གེས།
།དུག་རྣམས་མ་ལུས་པར་ནི་སེལ་མ།

HOMAGE TO HER WHO HOLDS IN HER HAND THE HARE-MARKED MOON
IN THE FORM OF THE GODS' LAKE
WHO TOTALLY DISPELS POISON
BY RECITING TWICE TARA AND P'AT.

- THE HARE-MARKED MOON: the moon. In the East, people distinguish a hare on the moon (or a rabbit), clearly drawn, with its two large ears standing straight up.
- THE GODS' LAKE: another metaphor for the moon, compared to a perfectly round lake, very beautiful, filled with white, clear, and fresh water.
- TARA AND P'AT: Mantras used by Tara to neutralize poisons.

• DISPELS POISON: poisons are of two kinds, "immobile" (mineral and herbal poisons) and mobile (poisonous animals or dangerous animals such as rabid dogs).

Stanza 19

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལྷ་ཡི་ཚོགས་རྣམས་རྒྱལ་པོ།
།ལྷ་དང་མིའམ་ཅི་ཡིས་བསྙེན་མ།
།ཀུན་ནས་གོ་ཆ་དགའ་བའི་བརྗེད་ཀྱིས།
།རྩོད་དང་རྨི་ལམ་ངན་པ་སེལ་མ།

HOMAGE TO HER WHO IS HONORED BY HOSTS OF GODS, KINGS,
GODS, AND HORSE-HEADED BEINGS,
WHO DISPELS CONFLICTS AND BAD DREAMS
WITH HER ARMOR OF RESPLENDENT JOY.

• HOSTS OF GODS: gods of the desire sphere gathered in six classes whose dwellings rise in tiers above Mount Meru.

• KINGS: sovereigns governing a whole universe called "chakravartins," as well as other kings.

• GODS, refers here to the local deities who inhabit a mountain, a lake, or a forest.

• HONORED BY: the powerful beings mentioned above show their allegiance to Tara by bowing down to her feet.

• HORSE-HEADED BEINGS: musicians with a human body and the head of a horse (Sanskrit, kinnara).

• ARMOR: mantras consecrated by Tara and the mudras that she accomplishes provide to those who do her practice a protection comparable to an armor.

• JOY: this armor gives joy and happiness to the minds of those who wear it.

• RESPLENDENT: the armor gives a brilliance to the body and speech.

• DISPELS CONFLICTS AND BAD DREAMS: the other effect of the armor provided by Tara's mantras and mudras.

Stanza 20

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་ཉི་མ་ཟླ་བ་རྒྱས་པའི།
།སྤྱན་གཉིས་པོ་ལ་འོད་རབ་གསལ་མ།
།ཧ་ར་གཉིས་བརྗོད་ཏུཏྟ་ར་ཡིས།
།ཤིན་ཏུ་དྲག་པོའི་རིམས་ནད་སེལ་མ།

HOMAGE TO HER WHOSE TWO EYES SHINE
WITH THE RADIANCE OF THE SUN AND MOON
WHO DISPELS VIRULENT EPIDEMICS
WITH TWO HARA AND WITH TUTTARA.

• WHOSE TWO EYES SHINE: the radiance of Tara's sight of compassion is such that it frees beings of inferior realms and other worlds from their suffering, and establishes a state of happiness for them.

• HARA AND TUTTARA: mantras through which Tara dispels epidemics. Beside the literal meaning, Taranatha gives a more general interpretation:

• HARA AND TUTTARA: represents recitation of Tara's mantra.

• VIRULENT EPIDEMICS: conflicting emotions (anger, desire-attachment, blindness, pride, jealousy, and so on).

• WHOSE TWO EYES SHINE WITH THE RADIANCE OF THE SUN AND MOON: by the light of the right eye, Tara scares violent beings and burns away negative activity and suffering like the sun. By the light of her left eye, comparable to nectar flowing out of the moon, she gives life, wealth, and happiness.

Stanza 21

།ཕྱག་འཚལ་དེ་ཉིད་གསུམ་རྣམས་བཀོད་པས།
།ཞི་བའི་མཐུ་དང་ཡང་དག་ལྡན་མ།
།གདོན་དང་རོ་ལངས་གནོད་སྦྱིན་ཚོགས་རྣམས།
།འཇོམས་པ་ཏུ་རེ་རབ་མཆོག་ཉིད་མ།

HOMAGE TO HER WHO THROUGH THE THREE ESTABLISHED
PRINCIPLES
FULLY POSSESSES THE POWER OF PACIFYING
TO TURE, THE SUBLIME, VICTOR
OF THE SPIRITS, BLOOD-DRINKING SPIRITS, AND LOCAL DEITIES.

Taranatha successively applies the four modes of interpretation of a tantra to this stanza.

Literal Meaning

- THE THREE PRINCIPLES: the three "suchnesses," or the three qualities characterizing realization
  - the base: emptiness
  - the path: absence of belief in the reality of phenomena
  - the result: nonaspiration, absence of expectation
- ESTABLISHED: the three principles are established to lead beings to genuine happiness and perfect awakening
- FULLY POSSESSES THE POWER OF PACIFYING: thanks to the three principles, Tara rids beings of the two veils

(veil of conflicting emotions and veil of dualistic knowledge) and establishes them in the peace of awakening
- SPIRITS: term covering 18 categories of spirits provoking illness and other difficulties
- BLOOD-DRINKING SPIRITS: represent here the power of black magic
- LOCAL DEITIES: in Sanskrit, yakshas
- TURE: the swift one
- VICTOR: Tara gains victory over all that causes evil.

Common Meaning
- THE THREE PRINCIPLES: the three syllables OM, AH, HUNG (essence of the body, speech, and mind) placed at the three places on Tara's body (forehead, throat, and heart)
- POWER OF PACIFYING: the power to protect beings against any obstacle.

Hidden Meaning
- THE THREE PRINCIPLES: appearance, expansion, and attainment designate here the three steps of the manifestation of clear light in the six yogas of Naropa
- ESTABLISHED: the succession of the above three steps
- POWER OF PACIFYING: the peace in the instant, complete emptiness, and clear light stemming from the three steps
- SPIRITS: subtle channels (Sanskrit, nadi)
- BLOOD-DRINKING SPIRITS: the energy "drops" (Sanskrit, bindu) that are found or circulating in the channels at the same time as the subtle winds
- LOCAL DEITIES: thoughts that disappear in the clear light.

Ultimate Meaning

- THE THREE PRINCIPLES: the vajra-body, vajra-speech, and vajra-mind. "Vajra" here signifies the state of full awakening, buddhahood.
- ESTABLISHED: these three vajras are the primordial nature of phenomena
- FULLY POSSESSES THE POWER TO PACIFY: given that the three vajras are primordially present, that they are from this time forward the peace of realization, one establishes oneself by meditating in the state where one is inseparable from them
- SPIRITS: suffering
- BLOOD-DRINKING SPIRITS: karma
- LOCAL DEITIES: conflicting emotions
- THE SUBLIME: once victory is gained over suffering, karma, and conflicting emotions, there is the primordial awareness that is great felicity.

Concluding lines

།རྩ་བའི་སྔགས་ཀྱི་བསྟོད་པ་འདི་དང་།
།ཕྱག་འཚལ་བ་ཉི་ཤུ་རྩ་གཅིག།

SUCH ARE THE PRAISE OF THE ROOT MANTRA
AND THE TWENTY-ONE-FOLD HOMAGE.

- THE ROOT MANTRA: Tara's mantra OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA is distributed throughout the text of the praise.
- THE TWENTY-ONE-FOLD HOMAGE: each stanza starts with the word "homage."

5—Buddhism and Women

Tara is a female deity, furthermore, she is a woman who has become a goddess.

The status of women in buddhism often appears to have been inferior to that of men. For example, in the story of Wisdom Moon—the future Tara—monks did not hesitate to sincerely advise her, for her own good, to aspire to a male existence in a future rebirth.

Other examples of this way of thinking can be found. Likewise, Shantideva, in his famous *Bodhisattva Way of Awakening* wrote, "May all female beings become male!"

To understand such wishes, it is indispensable to look at the context of ancient India. The situation of women was considered socially very inferior. Entirely dependant upon men, women had very little freedom or power to make decisions. Doomed to family and domestic tasks, they only had limited access to the dharma. Under these conditions, it was far better to be male than female. Shantideva certainly did not see women as inferior but considered women's position unfavorable for spiritual practice. However, what was due to certain circumstances has very little value outside of those circumstances. In reality, today more than ever, buddhism does not distinguish men from women, crediting them both with the same spiritual potential and with the same capabilities to realize it.

MEN AND WOMEN: A UNIQUE POTENTIAL

The notion of potential for spiritual development occupies a fundamental place in buddhism. In fact, it is considered that without the presence of a potential effect within a cause, this effect would never appear. Thus, oil is obtained from a sesame seed or butter from milk because these ingredients are already present in them in a latent state. If this were not so, a seed could be crushed or cream churned for ages without ever obtaining anything.

If human beings have the possibility to exit ignorance and attain awakening, it is because they have what is called the "mind in itself," or the "heart of awakening," that is, the potential for awakening. In reality, this potential does not only belong to human beings, for all beings share this in a universal way, whether they are animals or are in other conditions of existence in which beings are not definitively locked. Shared universally by all beings, it does not belong, therefore, more to men than women.

This heart of awakening is defined by several aspects:

– its essence is emptiness, which implies that it embraces the totality of beings

– it has the quality of dharmata or tathagata, which means that it is not simply emptiness but that it has the power to become awakened, just like the seed of a flower contains the virtual color, perfume, and other characteristics of the future flower. This potentiality is, therefore, common to all beings without difference in quality. It is not better in some beings or worse in others.

– finally, it classifies all beings in the "species" of awakening. Since they have the potentiality of awakening, they attain awakening, just like a seed of a carnation can effectively become a carnation whereas a seed of another flower, of a different species, could not possibly produce a carnation. This third aspect implies that it is possible to pass from a latent state to the result and that spiritual practice makes sense.

The heart of awakening is not, however, sufficient to attain awakening. If it constitutes a permanent cause, an ever present foundation, it must be associated with favorable circumstances. It needs a "support," that is, a particular condition of existence such as a human existence.

It need not only be a human existence but a life containing a certain number of characteristics without which a spiritual progression would not be possible. One counts ten indispensable conditions:

- five conditions inherent in the person
  - human condition
  - being born in a country where the dharma has spread
  - having possession of all senses, that is, the faculties of communication that allow one to understand the dharma
  - not pursuing an occupation in conflict with the buddhist precepts
  - having faith in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha)
- five outer factors
  - a buddha must have manifested on Earth
  - He or she must have taught the dharma
  - the teaching must be alive
  - the teaching must be known
  - the structures to spread the teaching must be supported by disciples.

It is said that, on the basis of the heart of awakening and human existence endowed with the required conditions above, anyone who makes the effort to attain awakening will. It is interesting to note that these affirmations were made by the Buddha 2500 years ago, at a time when women's condition—as we have noted—was socially inferior to that of men. In this context, the Buddha did not have to spare people's sensibilities; however, from the point of view of spiritual possibilities, he made no distinction between men and women. He did not declare that the possibility of attaining awakening was reserved for men, but that anyone (man or woman) making the effort to walk the path would attain the goal.

In the spiritual domain, the true question is that of practice. If practice is done, whether one is a man or a woman, one will obtain a result. If practice is not done, no result will be attained, regardless of whether one is a man or a woman, or even if one has a favorable human existence.

REMARKABLE WOMEN IN INDIAN BUDDHISM

All through its history, buddhism in India, and in Tibet as well, has seen a great number of remarkable women appear; some well-known whose lives are recorded in written texts; others whose names are only momentarily engraved in memory; and others who have remained anonymous.

At the time of the Buddha, it is probable that many female disciples attained arhathood.[17] There were many nuns then. The Vinaya[18] recalls the case of Sukyegu Dangmo and the 500 nuns who accompanied her. However, we do not have detailed documents on the lives of these women.

Let us mention some of them who later left an indelible imprint on the long history of Indian buddhism, like Gelongma Palmo, Mandarava, Niguma, and Sukhasiddhi.

GELONGMA PALMO — Gelongma Palmo was born to a royal family in North West India. At a very young age, she decided to renounce her privileges as a princess to lead a monastic life.

Her life took a dramatic turn when she contracted leprosy. Obliged to leave the monastery and abandoned by her servants, she retired to a small house away from any other dwelling.

In her despair, she nonetheless was fortunate to see a vision in a dream of King Indrabuthi who advised her to practice Avalokiteshvara (Chenrezig). If she did so, this would lead her to realize the nature of her mind. Thus, she applied herself, night and day reciting the mantra of the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

Time passed, and Gelongma Palmo, obtaining no result, became discouraged. Another dream brought her new instructions. This time, Manjushri (Jamyang) appeared in front of her and said, "Go to Lekar Shinpal and continue your practice of Avalokiteshvara. In five years, your realization will be equal to Tara's."

Gelongma Palmo went to the place indicated in the dream and in addition to reciting the mantra she fasted every other day. Thanks to Avalokiteshvara's grace, she was then completely healed from leprosy and her body regained the freshness of youth.

When she was 27 years old, she attained the first stage of the bodhisattva. At the same time, Tara appeared in front of her and told her, "You will obtain the capabilities to accomplish the activity of the buddhas of the three times."

Later, Avalokiteshvara appeared to her in all his splendor, in his form with 1,000 arms and 11 faces, his body filled with deities of the four classes of tantras, radiating innumerable pure lands through the pores of his skin.

Gelongma Palmo was filled with awe. However, she could not refrain from reproaching the deity. "Although I have accomplished your practice for a very long time and with much effort, why is it only now that you have revealed yourself to me?"

"As soon as you began reciting my name, I was with you and I never ceased to be with you since that time. There were karmic veils covering your mind hindering you from seeing me," Avalokiteshvara answered.

Receiving new instructions from Avalokiteshvara directly and continuing her practice, Gelongma Palmo finally attained the tenth stage of the bodhisattva.

MANDARAVA — Tantric buddhism was introduced to Tibet by the great Indian teacher Padmasambhava in the 8th century of our era. Among his many disciples, two women were his mystical companions, each playing an important role. One of them was an Indian, Mandarava. The other woman, Yeshe Tsogyal, was Tibetan.

Mandarava was named after the "paradise tree with red flowers" and was the daughter of the King of Sahor. When she became Padmasambhava's companion, her father was so annoyed that he ordered the yogi to be burned alive. However, Padmasambhava transformed the blazing fire into a lake. The King gained faith in him and relinquished his kingdom and the princess to him.

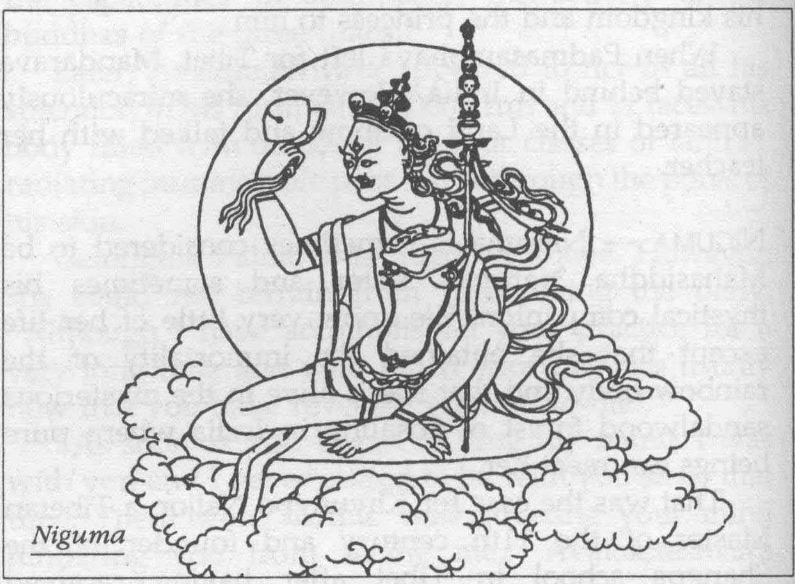
When Padmasambhava left for Tibet, Mandarava stayed behind in India. However, she miraculously appeared in the Land of Snow and talked with her teacher.

NIGUMA — Niguma is sometimes considered to be Mahasiddha Naropa's sister and sometimes his mystical companion. We know very little of her life except that she obtained the immortality of the rainbow body and that she is alive in the mysterious sandalwood forest of Sosaling in India where pure beings can meet her.

That was the case for Khyungpo Naljor, a Tibetan Master of the 11th century and founder of the Shangpa school in Tibet after having received instructions in India for many years. Advised by several of his teachers to meet Niguma, he went to the forest of Sosaling. After many wanderings and long prayers, he finally met Niguma in the form of a dark-skinned dakini dancing in the sky, holding a drum and a skull cup in her hands. Khyungpo Naljor bowed down, offered her gold, and requested instructions.

Niguma received the offering only to throw it away in disdain. The Tibetan became fearful, asking himself if he was not confronted by a flesh-eating dakini rather than the famous yogini. Niguma made a high mountain appear and from the summit four unceasing streams of gold were flowing. She told her visitor:

"If one has a pure vision, everything is gold. Without pure vision, there is no gold anywhere. I do not need your gold."



Niguma

And she returned the gold that she had thrown away a few moments before. She then bestowed her teachings and empowerments to Khyungpo Naljor, telling him, "Among illusory phenomena, through applying illusory meditation, illusory awakening arises by the strength of devotion."

SUKHASIDDHI — Sukhasiddhi's story, like that of Niguma's, with whom she is almost a contemporary, belongs to the collection of life stories of the Mahasiddhas of ancient India. It begins in Kashmir, in a peasant family during a severe famine in the area. All the provisions in the house were exhausted. Only a single bowl of rice was left.

The father and son, in desperation, decided to go begging. As they were leaving home, they told the mother to save the remaining rice for the "great black moon," an expression of darkest misery in case they come back empty-handed.

During their absence, a begging ascetic came to the door and said his name was "Great Black Moon." To show respect to the monastic and believing that she was obeying her husband, the mother offered him the remaining bowl of rice.

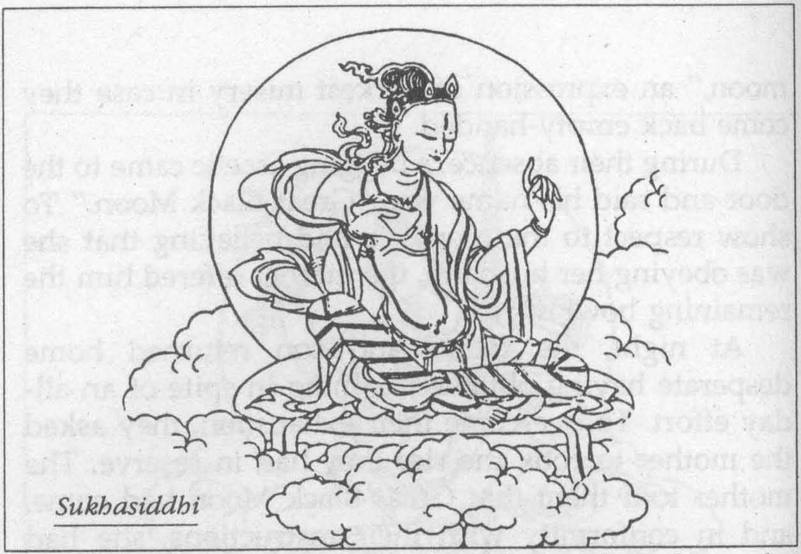
At night, the father and son returned home desperate having obtained nothing in spite of an all-day effort. To overcome their exhaustion, they asked the mother to cook the rice they had in reserve. The mother told them that Great Black Moon had come, and in conformity with their instructions, she had given him the precious food. The two men became so angry that they threw the poor woman out without waiting for her explanation.

Wandering along the road, the woman eventually arrived at the Land of Orgyen, west of Kashmir. She opened a store in the market place of the village selling barley beer that she brewed herself. In the nearby forest, the great yogi Virupa was dwelling. The yoginis who served him often visited the market and bought beer from the old woman because their master liked her brew. Curious about the beer's destination, the woman once asked them for whom they bought the beer.

"It is for our master, the yogi Virupa," the buyers said.

Mysteriously touched by the name she had never heard before, the woman refused to charge them any longer.

Virupa soon asked about the origin of the fine beer they bought.



Sukhasiddhi

"It is from an old woman in the market place who brews it herself," explained the servants, "and once she knew that it was for you, she refused payment."

"Ask her to come here," answered Virupa who understood that the faith and devotion of the old woman made her ready for instruction.

Taking with her a large quantity of beer for an offering and her heart filled with emotion, the old merchant came to visit Virupa. The latter immediately conferred teachings and empowerments to her. It is said that in one night, she obtained liberation and miraculously received the beauty and freshness of a 16-year-old body.

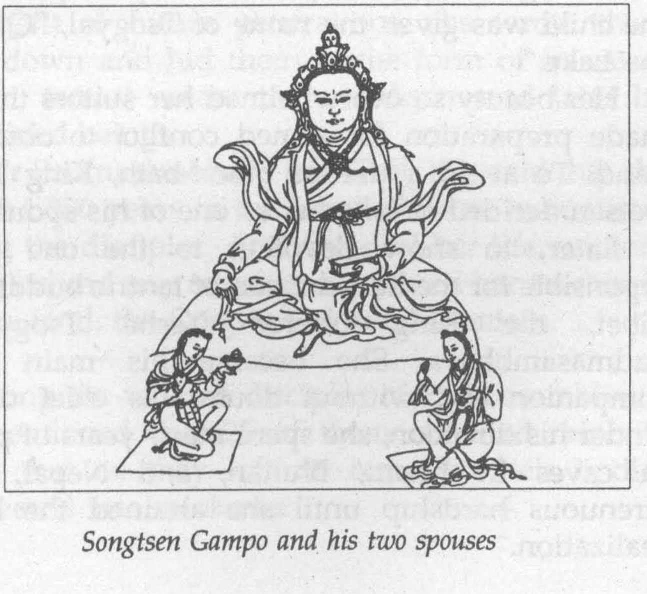
She then became known under the name of Sukhasiddhi, "Accomplished by Felicity" and directly received teachings from Vajradhara Buddha.

Instructions left by Sukhasiddhi and Niguma have been transmitted up to modern times. They are integrated in the canon of the Shangpa order.

REMARKABLE WOMEN OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM

The structure of Tibetan society probably did not allow women equality with men in the practice of dharma. However, the gates were not closed to women. Many monasteries all over Tibet were for nuns, and many women became famous through their realization. Let us take a look at some of those names preserved in history.

THE TWO SPOUSES OF SONGTSEN GAMPO — From the very beginning of the introduction of buddhism in Tibet, women have played an important role. King Songtsen Gampo, who reigned at the time buddhism was implanted in the Land of Snow, had two spouses. Their profound faith and realization were so impressive that these women are sometimes considered as emanations of Tara.



Songtsen Gampo and his two spouses

The first spouse, Kunsho, was a Chinese princess who brought with her as a dowry the venerated and holy buddha statue presently sheltered in the Jokhang in Lhassa, which all the Tibetans simply call Jowo, the "Lord."

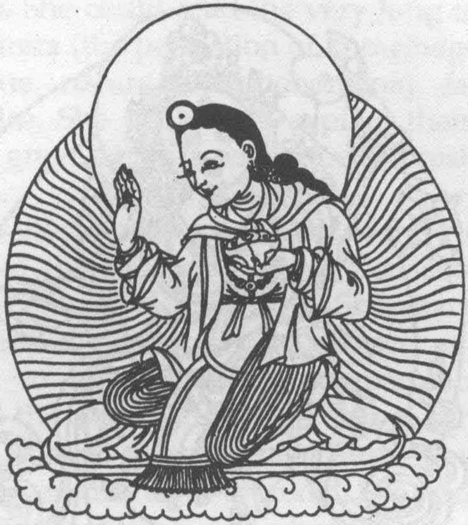
The second spouse, the Nepalese princess Tritsun also brought with her a statue of Akshobya Buddha, and it is kept in another temple of Lhassa, the Ramoche.

Both of them had many temples built and strongly supported the development of buddhism.

YESHE TSOGYAL — Yeshe Tsogyal, looked upon as an emanation of the deity Vajravarahi (Dorje Pamo), lived in the 8th and 9th century of our era. When she was born, the small lake near her parents' house became much larger. This event looked very auspicious and the child was given the name of Tsogyal, "Queen of the Lake."

Her beauty so overwhelmed her suitors that they made preparation for armed conflict to obtain her hand. To avoid a useless blood-bath, King Trisong Detsen decided to take her as one of his spouses.

Later, to show devotion to the one mainly reponsible for the introduction of tantric buddhism to Tibet, the King offered Yeshe Tsogyal to Padmasambhava. She became his main mystic companion and without doubt, his chief disciple. Under his direction, she spent many years of practice in caves in Kham, Bhutan, and Nepal, facing strenuous hardship until she attained the highest realization.

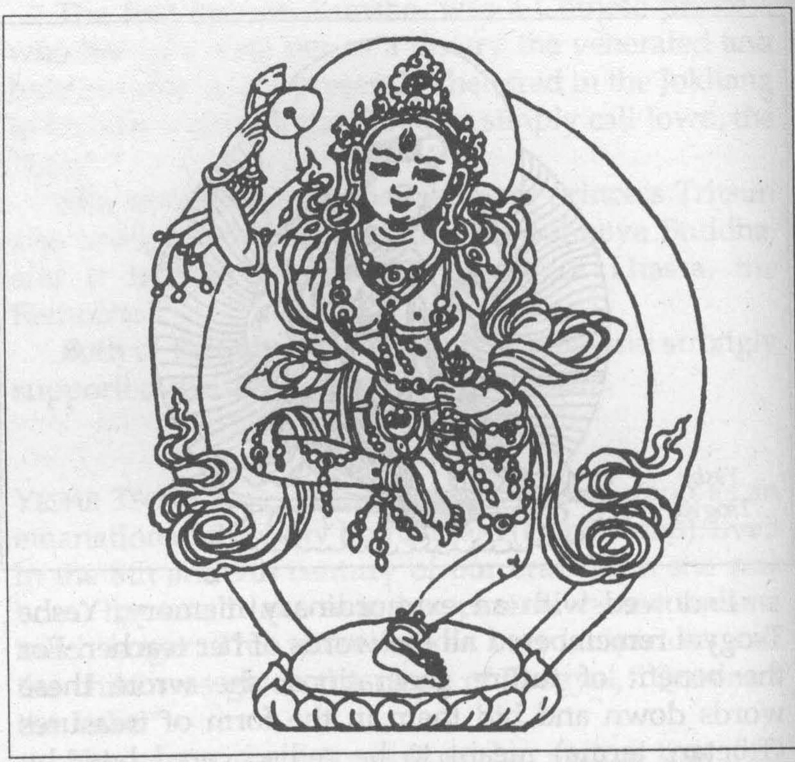


Yeshe Tsogyal

Endowed with an extraordinary memory, Yeshe Tsogyal remembered all the words of her teacher. For the benefit of future generations, she wrote these words down and hid them in the form of treasures (Tibetan, terma) meant to be rediscovered later by predestined beings.

After Padmasambhava left Tibet, it is said that she remained 200 years in the Land of Snow to continue guiding the disciples. At the end of her life, without leaving behind any remains, she joined her teacher in his pure land, the Copper Colored Mountain.

Among the women disciples of Padmasambhava, it is mentioned that 25 of them obtained rainbow bodies, that is, they left no remains, their bodies disappeared into rainbows.



MACHIK LABDRON — Machik Labdron was born in 1062 under extraordinary auspicious circumstances. Besides the fact that the little girl had a third eye on her forehead and she had on her tongue the red syllable HRI, she was born among rainbows, celestial music, and wonderful perfumes. Immediately at birth, she stood up and asked her mother if she had suffered too much giving birth. It is understandable why Machik Labdron was quickly considered as an extraordinary being, an emanation of the Great Mother (Prajnaparamita) and of the deity Vajravarahi (Dorje Pamo).

From an early age, she showed extraordinary capabilities. She could read the very long texts of the prajnaparamita (the perfection of knowledge showing the ultimate nature of phenomena) faster than anybody else. She could also explain their meaning even to the great scholars who were astonished by her knowledge.

Her knowledge was not limited to the intellect, she also realized the absence of ego. Consequently this caused many changes in her life. She abandoned the beautiful clothes she liked and dressed as a beggar. She began to appreciate the company of leprous people and the poor as much as that of scholars and meditators. She gave importance neither to the quality of housing nor the taste of food. She did not care about praise or blame and dwelled in a state of constant happiness.

She married the Indian teacher, Thopa Badra, with whom she had several children, and received many teachings of another great Indian teacher called Padampa Sangye.

Machik Labdron is also famous for having composed and taught a meditation practice—Chod—linked to the prajnaparamita that is seen as the only practice of Tibetan origin, while other practices have been transmitted from India. This initiative appeared suspect to Indian buddhists. They met in Bodhgaya to discuss this issue and sent three messengers to Tibet to examine Machik Labdron. She was able to give them enough proof of her past lives and her realization to convince them of the authenticity of the Chod practice.

Machik Labdron lived to the age of 99 years old and counted among her many disciples four particularly remarkable women who are called the Four Jewel-Women: Gotsa Jewel, Palden Jewel, Sonam Jewel, and Rinchen Jewel. In all, Machik had 108 women disciples who attained realization.

The great-grandson of Machik Labdron, Donyo Samdrup who was himself a great teacher, helped 18 of his women disciples, called the 18 daughters, to attain realization.

In the life of Milarepa, the great yogi of the Land of Snow, we encounter a great number of women disciples who attained realization, such as his sister Peta, the young Paldar Bum, Sale O, Lekse Bum, and Rechungma. The four latter ones, called the four sisters, have attained rainbow bodies.

In all the schools of Tibetan buddhism, Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyu, and Gelug, numerous women have illustrated themselves by profound spiritual accomplishments even if history has not recorded their names. Their rank was then equal to that of men. They could teach, give empowerments, and accomplish all the activities of the dharma.

PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS

I would now like to talk about three most remarkable women lamas that I have met in person.

UGYEN TSOMO — The first one, Ugyen Tsomo, was the 15th Karmapa Khakyab Dorje's spouse. I met her when I was studying in Tsurpu, the Karmapa's monastery, not far from Lhassa. The 15th Karmapa had already passed away. I must have been 13 or 14 years old. She had to have been about 60 years old. Given the ties uniting the previous Bokar Rinpoche to the 15th Karmapa, she showed me much affection, offered me food, and so on. Ugyen Tsomo had practically spent all of her life in retreat, devoting herself exclusively to practice. Even at Tsurpu, she granted interviews only outside of her strict schedule of meditation. From time to time, she gave empowerments to the monks. I received the empowerment of long life from her. It is said, although I did not see it personally, that the imprint of the sacred letter AH, symbol of the buddha's speech, spontaneously appeared on her tongue.

Given how highly she was regarded, she was called Khandro Rinpoche, "Precious Dakini."

After her death, she manifested in the form of a female tulku. Having again received the title of Khandro Rinpoche, the new incarnation, after completing training, also teaches and gives empowerments in India and in the West.

DRIKUNG KHANDRO — Drikung Khandro was a woman lama of great realization who belonged to the Drikung Kagyu school. She was neither a nun nor did she marry. She had long hair like lay people. I did not meet her in Tibet but in Bodhgaya, India. She must have been about 60 years old at that time. I went there to receive teachings from Kunu Lama, and she was also in Bodhgaya. Therefore, I was able to meet her. Among the Drikung Kagyupas, she enjoyed the highest esteem and gave teachings and empowerments.

ANI YESANG — She was a nun from the Bokar area in Western Tibet, where I spent my youth before coming to India, and had the reputation of possessing a great realization. Known as Ani Yesang (short for Yeshe

Sangmo, "Excellent Wisdom"), she was a disciple of Lama Degyal Tsampa who studied with the next to the last Dujom Rinpoche. She was famous for being the most accomplished disciple of this lama. She had left the area of her birth to live in a cave near Mount Kailash.

When I was 11 years old, I went on pilgrimage to Mount Kailash. My tutor accompanied me on this journey, as well as his attendant who was a relative of the nun in retreat. The attendant asked us to make a detour to visit her. We went to her cave. Ani Yesang was very old and lived alone, without any attendant, in her cave divided into two small rooms. The room where she was faced her shrine and was lighted only by a narrow hole from the outside. We made offerings to her and she offered us tea. I do not remember what she told us. I only remember the strong impression she made on me.

I believe that she lived to be 80 years old. She was a saintly person of great realization.

Question: Although the possibilities of access to teachings and practice were the same for men and women in Tibet, there were more monks than nuns.
Answer: It is true that nuns were less numerous than monks. I do not know why. Perhaps, from an institutional point of view, monks had more power and this led them to build numerous and large monasteries for themselves.

Question: In the monastic tradition, one encounters two levels of ordination called in Tibetan getsul (Sanskrit, shramanera) and gelong (Sanskrit, bhikshu). These two levels were brought to Tibet for men, but Tibetan nuns

were always limited to the getsulma level without receiving the major ordination of gelongma. Why is there this difference?
Answer: For some historical reasons that I do not know, the tradition of the gelongmas was never created in Tibet. It exists today in China (Hong Kong and Taiwan) where some Tibetan nuns go to receive it. The Dalai Lama has been studying the possibility of including this Chinese tradition into the Tibetan institution.

Question: In the code of monastic rules as written in the Vinaya, a bikshu must follow 253 precepts while a bikshuni must follow 340 of them. Does this suggest some discrimination between men and women?
Answer: On the one hand, the number of commitments one takes depends on the greater or lesser capabilities one has to keep them. For example, in the minor ordination of a shramanera, one commits to respect only 36 precepts, whereas major ordination of a bikshu requires observance of 253 precepts. Perhaps, women have a greater capability for keeping a greater number of precepts. Perhaps also, at the time of the Buddha, it was considered that ethics must be stricter for women than for men.

Question: In Tibet, did women truly have the same possibilities for study and practice in retreat centers as the men?
Answer: Given that the number of nuns was smaller than the number of monks, nuns who studied or practiced in retreat were also less, but this does not mean that they had less opportunity to do so.

Many small retreat centers for nuns existed here and there. The most renowned center was in Kham in eastern Tibet in Nangchen, where the Kebcha monastery enrolled about a hundred nuns. The retreat center linked to the monastery allowed the nuns to accomplish three year retreats in which they practiced the six yogas of Naropa, and particularly tumo practice whose effect is to produce great physical heat. The custom was that each year during the full moon of the first month of the Tibetan year (February-March), that is, at the coldest time of the year, nuns in retreat would go out in procession to show their skill in the tumo technique. At the four corners of the building, large containers of water were placed with a stone serving as a hammer to break the ice that quickly forms on the surface. With all the people of the area present, the nuns would set out of the retreat center in the morning before sunrise, hands on their hips and dressed in simple cotton clothes. The respect they inspired was such that people prostrated and recited prayers when they passed. When the nuns arrived on the eastern side, they placed cotton shawls soaked in the icy water on their shoulders as they continued very slowly toward the south. The heat they produced was enough to make great steam come from the shawls that quickly became dry. If their shawl was dry on reaching the southern side, they would take another shawl, and so on.

The best tumo practitioners could dry four shawls like that, others three, or two, or only one. There were some who could not dry any at all. This procession was very famous in the area.

Question: Were retreat centers for nuns created again in India?
Answer: In the Kagyupa school, there is one center attached to Sherab Ling, Situ Rinpoche's Monastery. Perhaps, there are more in other schools.

Question: For lay women, what was the usual way of practicing the dharma outside the monasteries?
Answer: They would recite the Refuge prayer, Tara's Praise, and the prayer for rebirth in the Pure Land of Bliss (Tibetan, Dewachen), which they especially loved, as well as other mantras—Avalokiteshvara and Padmasambhava mantras—and other prayers. Most often, while doing other tasks or watching their herds of yaks and sheep, they would recite mantras and prayers almost continuously.

Question: In Europe, when the Christian religion was still very strong, often women had more faith than men. Was this difference noticeable in Tibet?
Answer: It was true and is still true today. Generally, women have greater faith than men. They are also more diligent in practice.

Question: Concerning dharma practice, do you see any great change in the present situation of women in India and Tibet compared to Tibet in the past?
Answer: Change is certain. Before, in Tibet, lay women did not know the dharma very well, but as previously mentioned, their faith was great, and they recited mantras almost constantly.

Today, young people, women or men, study, develop their intelligence and culture, and sometimes are able to talk well about the dharma. However, it is only on the level of words, something superficial. The old profound faith has disappeared with few exceptions. True practice does not attract young people. Only elderly people continue the tradition as it was in Tibet.

Question: Do young people receive some dharma education in the schools in India?
Answer: The wish of the Dalai Lama is that the children in all the Tibetan schools, girls and boys, receive a buddhist education during their studies. To this effect, there is a teacher of buddhism in all the schools. A buddhist university was founded in Varanasi. It is open to all—monks and lay people, girls and boys—and various buddhist disciplines are taught as well as Sanskrit and English languages. But few young Tibetans show deep interest in the dharma.

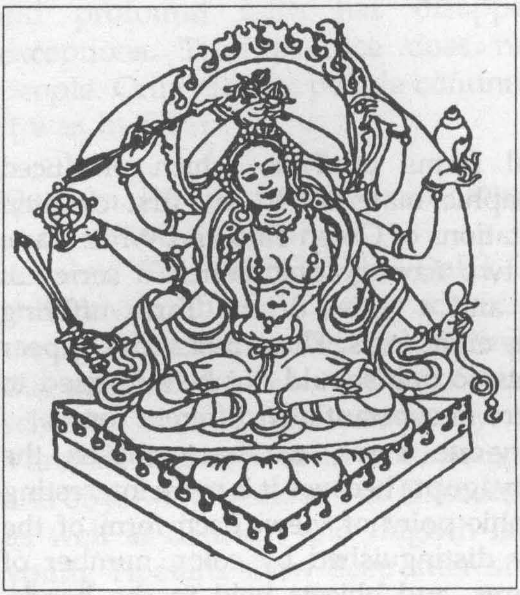
Question: In the West, there are more women than men who are interested in the dharma. Do you see any particular reason for that?
Answer: The reason is, without doubt, that which we mentioned earlier. Women are easily and spontaneously more inclined to faith. Their minds are more open to spiritual life than men's.

6– Iconography

There are several forms of Tara, which produced abundant iconographic material. In the first chapter, there are representations of Green Tara and White Tara. We present here two iconographic series, a series of twenty-one Taras and a series of the Taras offering protection from the eight fears. These two series appear with many variants so one should not be surprised to find them elsewhere in substantially different forms.

For the twenty-one Taras, we have chosen the tradition called Suryagupta because it is more interesting from an iconographic point of view. Each form of the deity is effectively distinguished by color, number of arms, faces, postures, and objects held in the hands, whereas other traditions present only variants in color and symbolic objects set on a lotus. Artists following the Suryagupta tradition often give one tangkha to each aspect of the deity while in other traditions, the twenty-one aspects are generally collected together in the same painting.

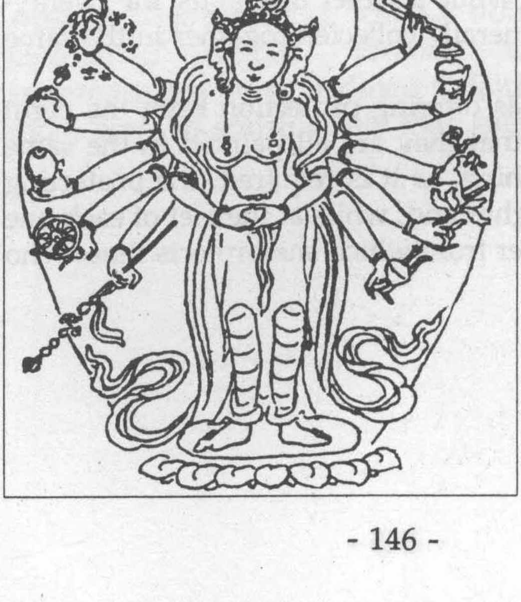
As for the Taras offering protection from the eight fears, we can see that they are all painted in the same posture accomplishing, as it is required, the protecting mudra with the right hand, while at the feet of each one is shown the danger from which she protects those who pray to her.



Pravira Tara

རབ་ཏུ་དཔའ་བའི་སྒྲོལ་མ

Rabtu Pawai Drolma
Liberating One with Perfect Courage; red.
8 arms, 2 hands above her head in the mudra of great bliss holding a vajra and a bell. In the other right hands: holding an arrow, a wheel of dharma, and a sword. In the other left hands: holding a bow, a conch, and a rope.



Chandrakanti Tara

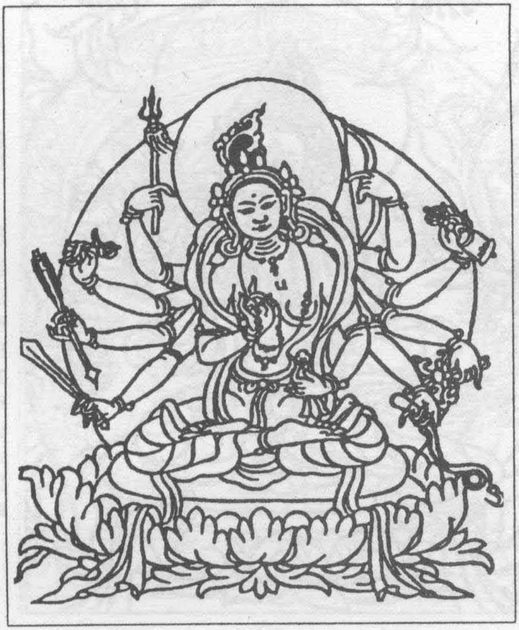
ཟླ་མདངས་ཀྱི་སྒྲོལ་མ

Dadang Gyi Drolma
Liberating One with a Moon Radiance; white.
Three faces symbolizing the Three Bodies: right, blue; center, white; left, golden.
12 arms symbolizing the 12 interdependent factors. In her right hands: holding a garland, a vajra, a jewel, a wheel, and a khatvanga. In her left hands: holding a text, a treasure vase, a bell, a lotus, and a vase.

Kanakavarna Tara

གསེར་མདོག་ཅན་གྱི་སྒྲོལ་མ་

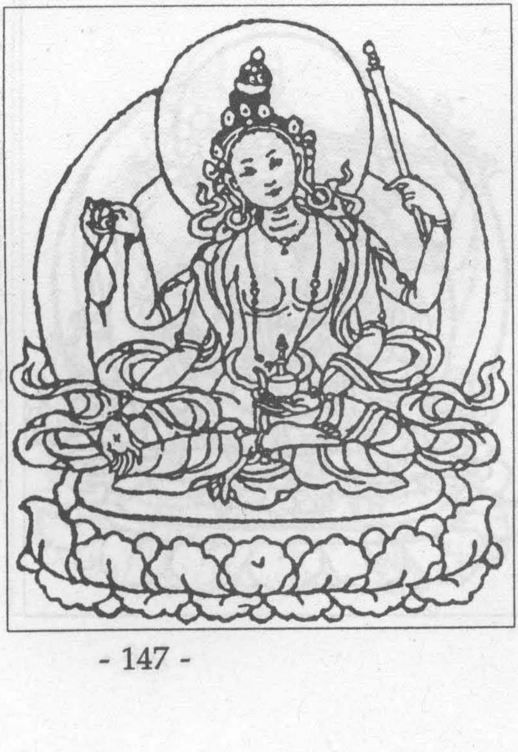
Serdokchen Gyi Drolma
Golden Liberating One; golden.
10 arms symbolizing the 10 paramitas. In her right hands: holding a mala, a trident, a vajra, an arrow, and a sword. In her left hands: holding a silk scarf, a lasso, a lotus, a bell, and a bow.

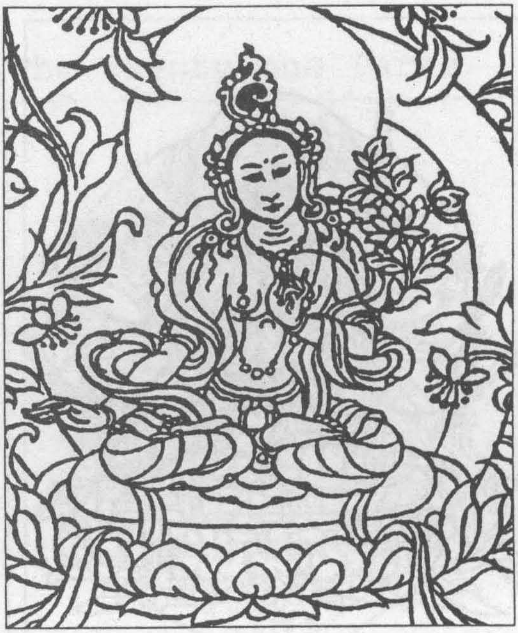


Ushnishavijaya Tara

གཙུག་ཏོར་རྣམ་པར་རྒྱལ་བའི་སྒྲོལ་མ་

Tsuktor Nampar Gyalwai Drolma
Liberating One with a Perfectly Victorious Crown Protuberance; golden.
4 arms, her right hands: holding a mala and displaying the giving mudra. In her left hands: holding a stick and a vase.

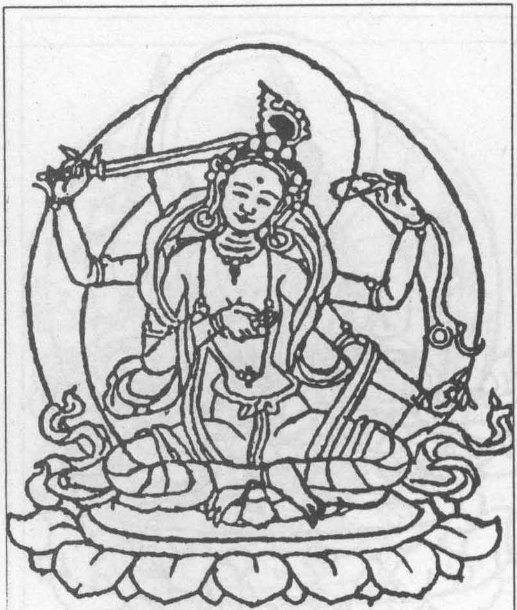




Humsvara-nadini Tara

ཧཱུྃ་སྒྲ་སྒྲོག་པའི་སྒྲོལ་མ

Humdradrokpai Drolma
Liberating One Producing the Sound HUM (HUNG); yellow.
2 arms, with her right hand: protecting mudra. With her left hand: mudra of the Three Jewels and holding a lotus.



Trailokya-vijaya Tara

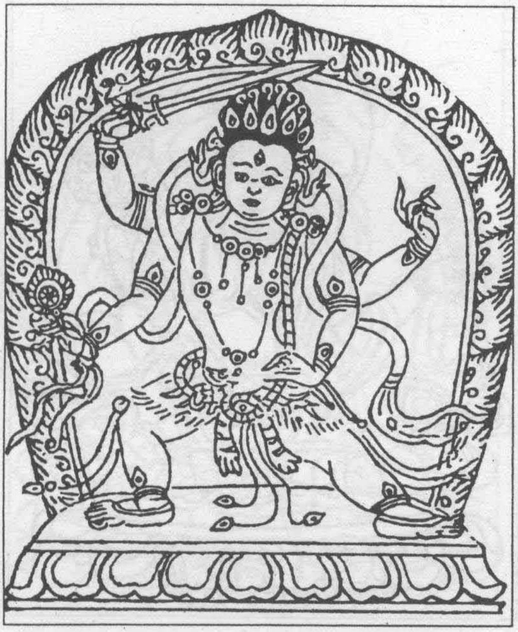
འཇིག་རྟེན་གསུམ་ལས་རྣམ་པར་
རྒྱལ་བའི་སྒྲོལ་མ

Jikten Sum Lai Nampargyalwai drolma
Liberating One Victorious over the Three Worlds; red.
4 arms, her right hands: holding a sword and a vajra; with her left hands: holding rope and displaying the threatening mudra.

Vadi-pramardaka Tara

རྒོལ་བ་འཇོམས་པའི་སྒྲོལ་མ་

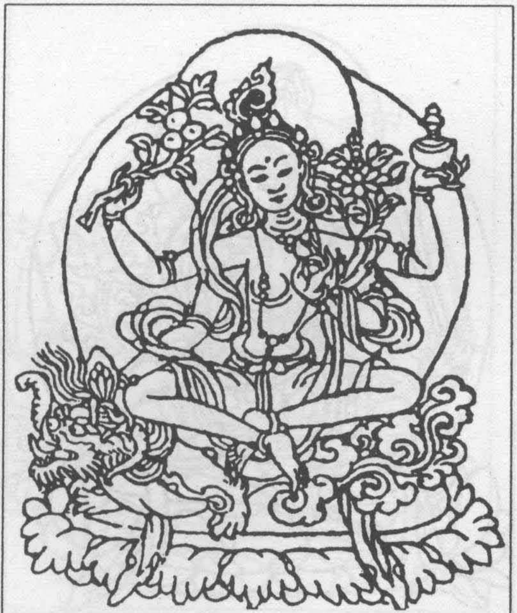
Golwa Jompai Drolma
Liberating One Victorious over Hostility; black.
Wrathful aspects, 4 arms, her right hands: holding a sword and a wheel; her left hands: displaying the threatening mudra and holding a rope.

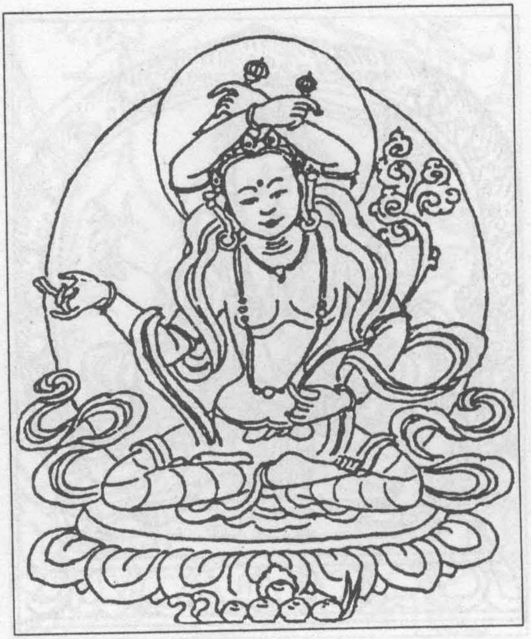


Vashitottamada Tara

དབང་མཆོག་སྟེར་བའི་སྒྲོལ་མ་

Wangchok Terwai Drolma
Liberating One Who Gives the Sublime Empowerment; golden.
Seated on a makara (sea monster), 4 arms, her right hands: holding a branch of the ashoka tree and a jewel; her left hands: a vase and a lotus.

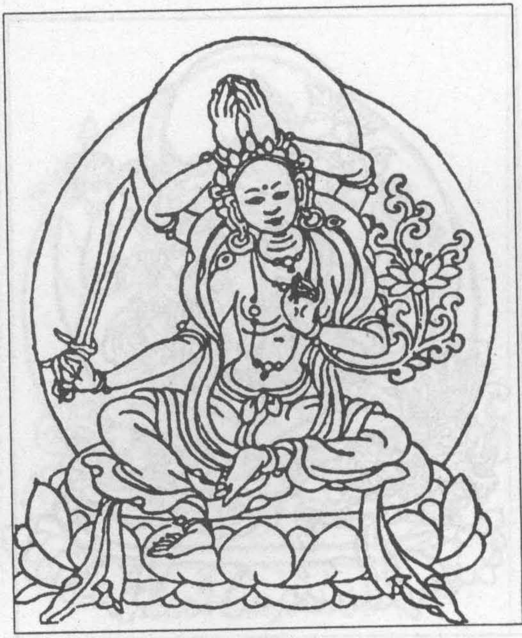




Varada Tara

མཆོག།སྩོལ་བའི་སྒྲོལ་མ་

Chok Tsolwai Drolma Liberating One Who Grants the Sublime; red. 4 arms, 2 hands above her head in the mudra of joy, holding a vajra and a bell. Other hand in a mudra (?). Other left hand holding a branch of the ashoka tree.



Shoka-vinodana Tara

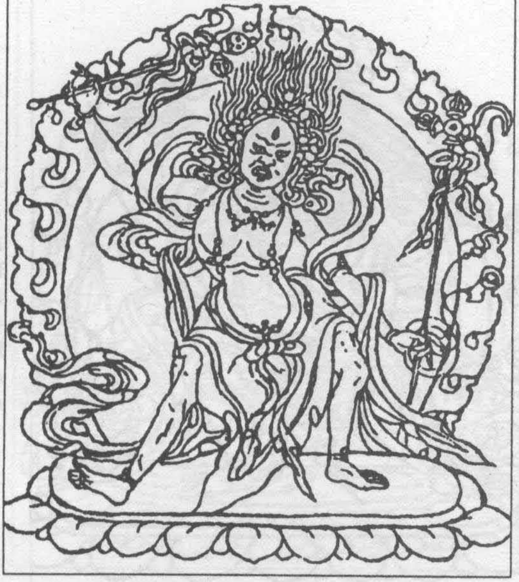
མྱ་ངན་སེལ་བའི་སྒྲོལ་མ

Nya-ngen Selwai Drolma Liberating One Who Dissipates Suffering; red. 4 arms, 2 hands above her head in the mudra of joy (palms joined) other right hand holding a sword, other left hand holding a branch of the ashoka tree.

Jagadvashi Tara

འགྲོ་བ་འགུགས་པའི་སྒྲོལ་མ

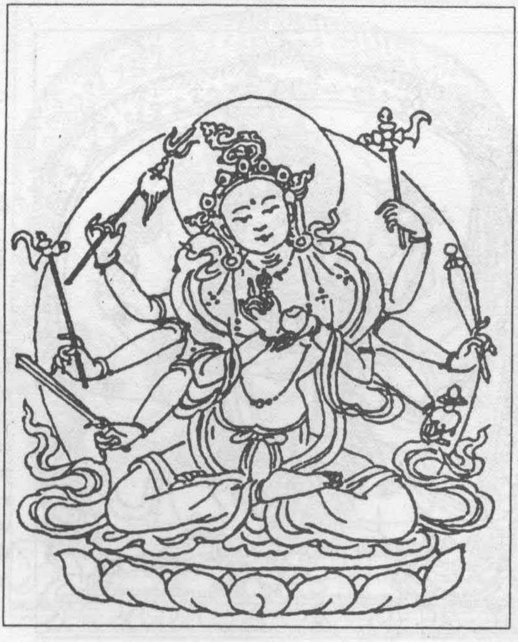
Drowa Gukpai Drolma
Liberating One Who Gathers Beings; black.
2 arms, she holds in each hand a hook (to gather beings).

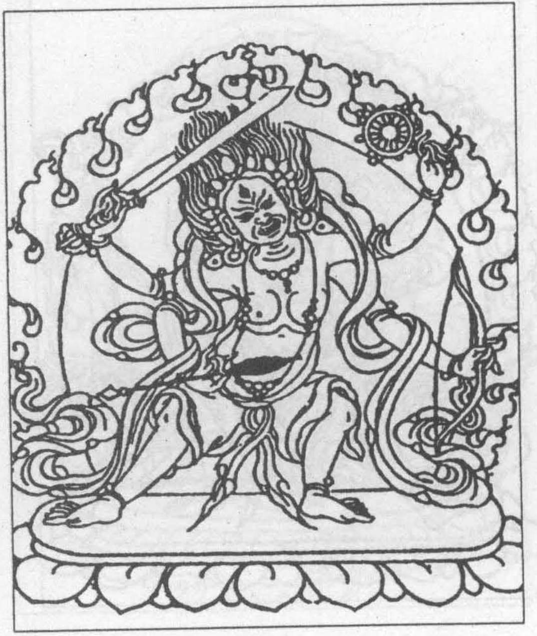


Mangalaloka Tara

བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྣང་བའི་སྒྲོལ་མ་

Trashi Nangwai Drolma
Liberating One with Auspicious Light; golden.
8 arms, in the right hands: a vajra, trident, hook, and sword; in the left hands: a jewel, hook, stick, and vase.

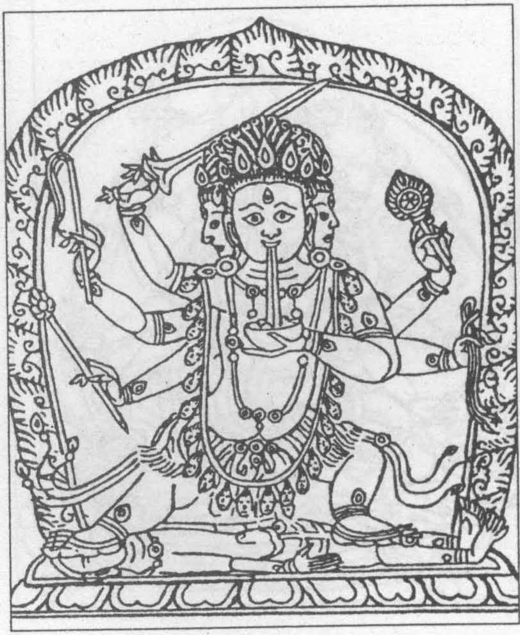




Paripachaka Tara

ཡོངས་སུ་སྨིན་པར་མཛད་པའི་སྒྲོལ་མ་

Yongsu Minparzepai Drolma
Liberating One Who Leads to Complete Ripening; red.
4 arms, in the right hands: a sword and an arrow; in the left hands: a wheel and a bow.



Bhrikuti Tara

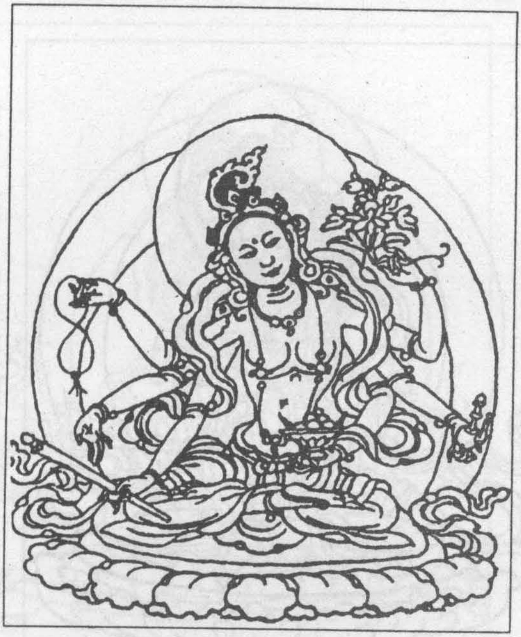
ཁྲོ་གཉེར་གཡོ་བའི་སྒྲོལ་མ་

Thronyer Yowai Drolma
Liberating One Frowning her Eyebrows; black.
3 faces, right: white, center: black, left: red, 6 arms, in her right hands: a sword, a hook, and a stick; in her left hands: a skullcup, a wheel, and a rope.

Mahashanti Tara

ཞི་བ་ཆེན་མོའི་སྒྲོལ་མ

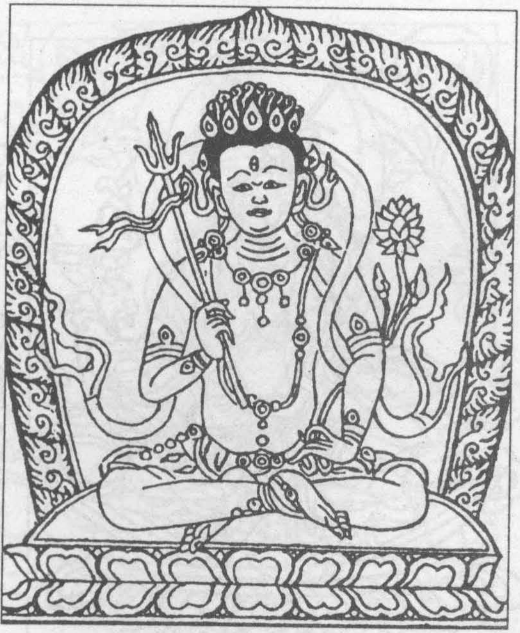
Shiva Chenmoi Drolma
Liberating One with Great Peace; white.
6 arms, in her right hands: a mala, giving mudra, and a stick, in her left hands: a lotus, a vase, and a cup filled with fruits.

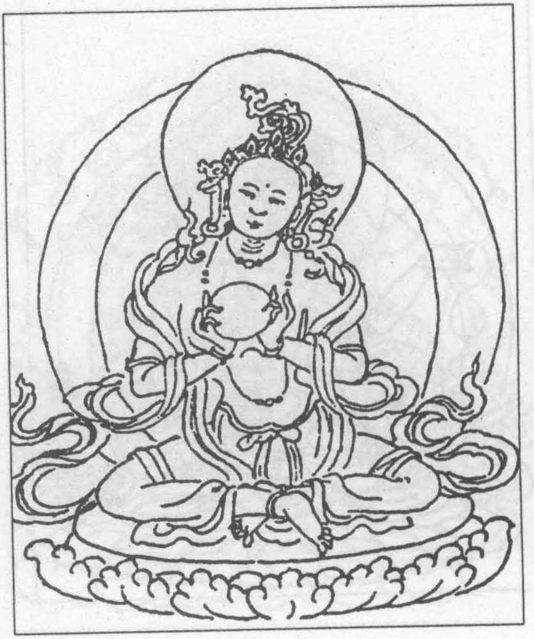


Raga-nisudana Tara

ཆགས་པ་འཇོམས་པའི་སྒྲོལ་མ

Chakpa Jompai Drolma
Liberating One Victorious over Attachment; orange-red.
2 arms, a trident in her right hand, a tree branch in her left hand.

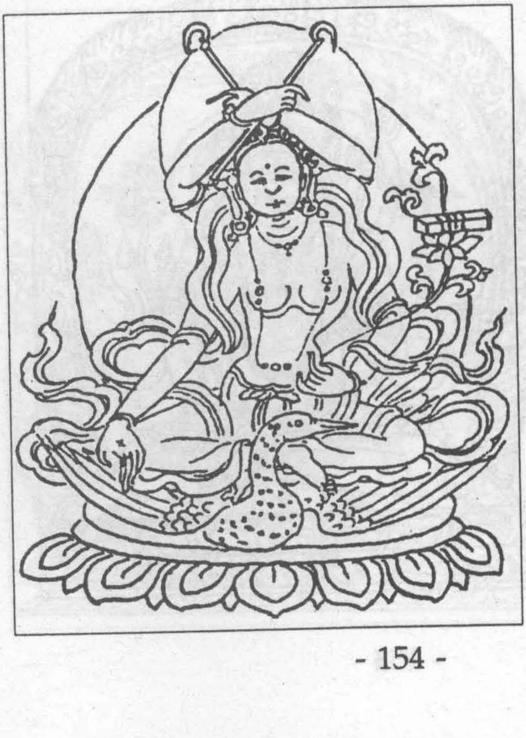




Sukha-sadhana Tara

སྒྲོལ་མ་བདེ་སྒྲུབ་མ་

Drolma Dedrupma
Liberating One Accomplishing Happiness; orange.
2 arms, holds in her hands a moon disc.



Vijaya Tara

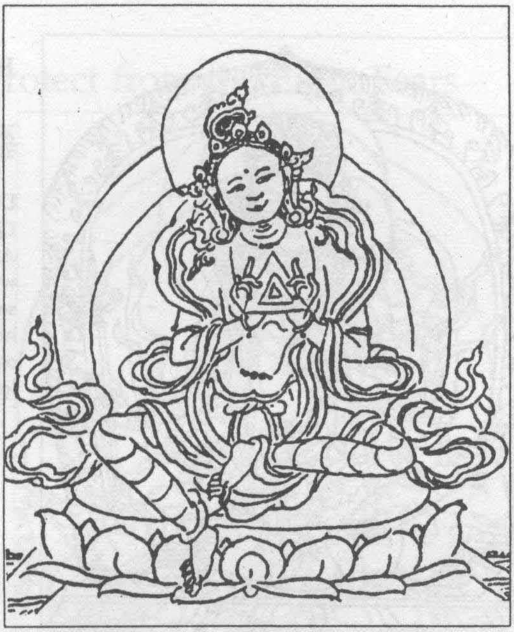
སྒྲོལ་མ་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་མ་

Drolma Namgyalma
Victorious Liberating One; white.
Seated on a goose, 4 arms, 2 hands above the head in the mudra of joy and holding hooks. Other right hand in giving mudra, other left hand holding a lotus upon which rests a text.

Duhkha-dahana Tara

སྒྲོལ་མ་སྡུག་བསྔལ་བསྲེགས་མ་

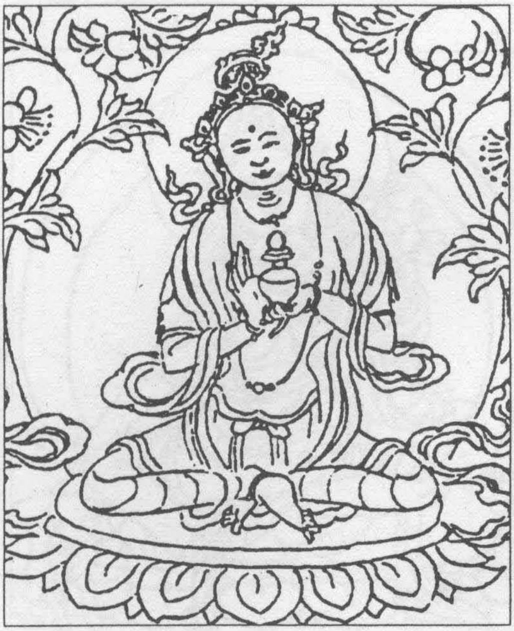
Drolma Dugngal Sekma
Liberating One Burning Suffering; white.
2 arms, holds in her hands a triangle symbolizing fire.

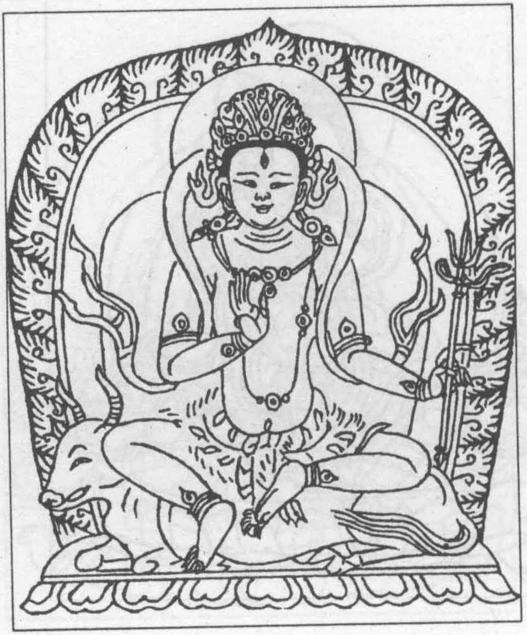


Siddhi-sambhava Tara

སྒྲོལ་མ་དངོས་གྲུབ་འབྱུང་མ་

Drolma Ngodrup Jungma
Liberating One Source of Accomplishments; orange.
2 arms, holds in her hands a vase containing the accomplishments (supernormal powers and realization of the nature of the mind).





Paripurana Tara

སྒྲོལ་མ་ཡོངས་རྫོགས་བྱེད་མ་

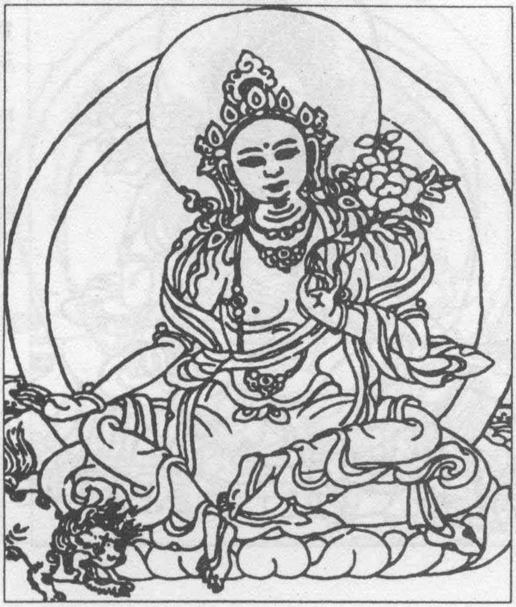
Drolma Yongzok Jema
Liberating One Who Has Achieved Perfection; white.
seated on a bull, 2 arms, her right hand in the mudra of protection, her left hand holds a trident.

Taras Who Protect from the Eight Fears

Mana simha bhaya trana

ང་རྒྱལ་སེང་གེའི་འཇིགས་སྐྱོབ་རྗེ་ བཙུན་མ་

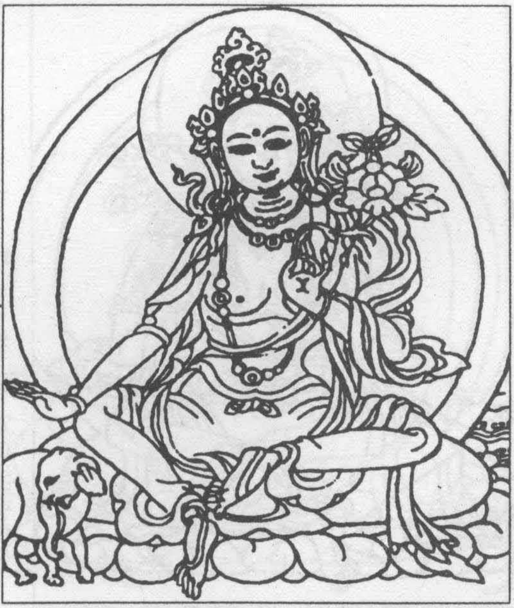
Ngagyal Senge Jikkyob Jetsunma
Queen who protects from the danger of pride and from lions

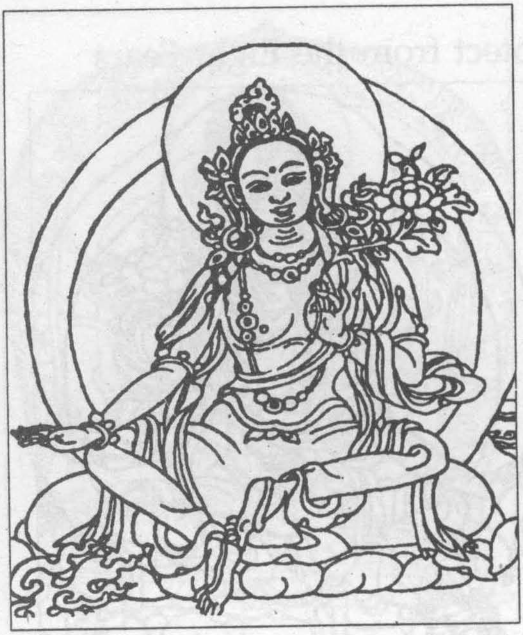


Moha-hasti-bhayatarini-devi

གཏི་མུག་གླང་པོའི་འཇིགས་སྒྲོལ་ ལྷ་མོ་

Timuk Langpoi Jikdrol Lahmo
Goddess who protects from the danger of torpor and from elephants

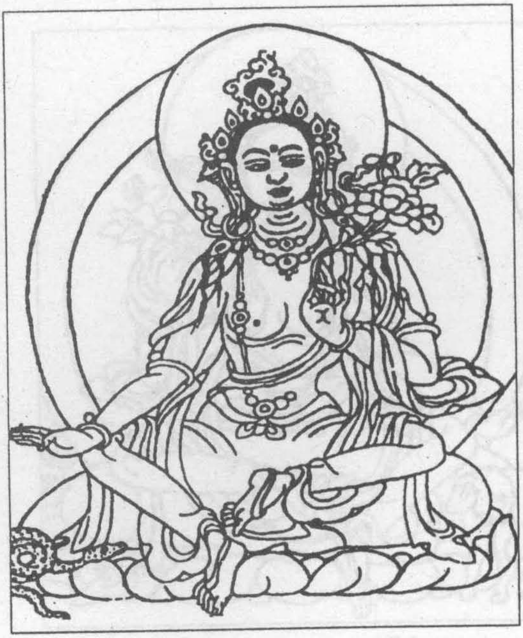




Dves-agni-prashamani

ཞེ་སྡང་མེ་དཔུང་ཚོགས་རྣམས་
རབ་ཞི་མ་

Shetang Mepung
Tsoknam Rab Shima
She who perfectly calms down anger and blazing fire



Irsya-sapa-visapaharani

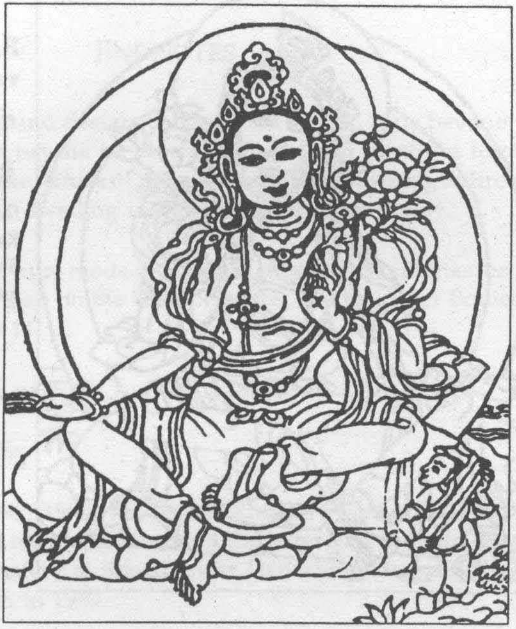
ཕྲག་དོག་སྦྲུལ་གྱི་དུག་རྣམས་
ཡོངས་སེལ་མ་

Tradok Drul Gyi
Duknam Yong Selma
She who completely removes jealousy and poisons from snakes

Kudristi-cora-upadravana-nirvarani

ལྟ་ངན་ཀུན་པོའི་ཉེར་འཚེ་ལས་བཟློག་མ

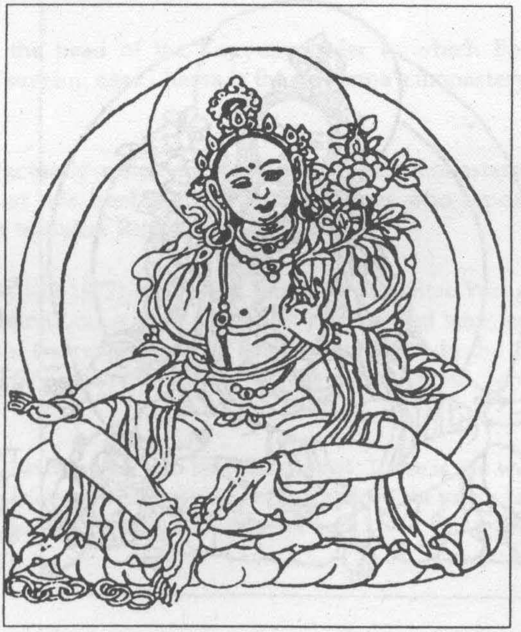
Ta-ngen Kunpoi Nyertse Le Dokma
She who removes the violence of false view and of thieves

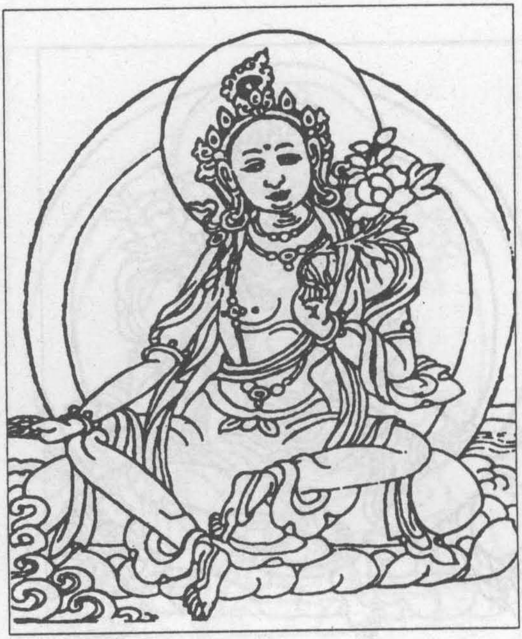


Ghora-matsarya-shrinkhala-mocani

མི་བཟད་སེར་སྣའི་ལྕགས་སྒྲོག་འགྲོལ་མཛད་མ

Mize Sernai Chakdrok Drolzema
She who liberates from insatiable greed and imprisonment





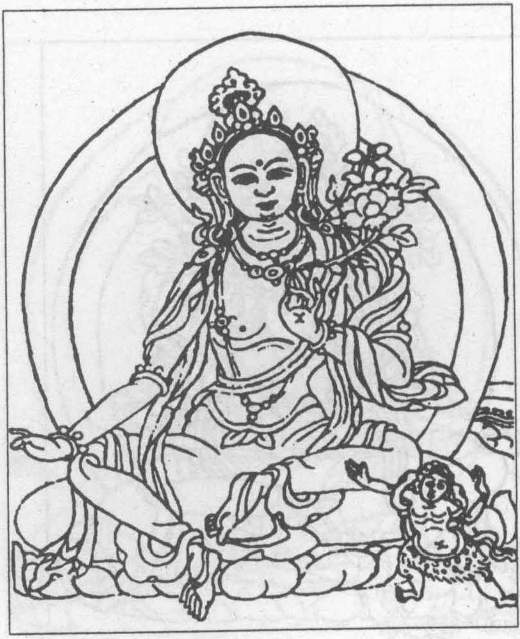
Rag-augha-vega-varta-shosani

འདོད་ཆགས་ཆུ་བོའི་རྦ་རློང་

སྐེམས་མཛད་མ

Dochak Chu-oi Balong Kem Zema

She who dries up desire and waters



Samshaya-pishaca-bhaya-trana-tara

ཐེ་ཚོམ་ཤ་ཟའི་འཇིགས་སྐྱོབ་སྒྲོལ་མ

Thetsom Shazai Jik Kyob Drolma

She who protects and frees from doubts and demons

ENDNOTES

1. The nature of the mind designates the mind as it is, truly beyond the veils imposed by the psyche to which the individual identifies himself or herself. Realizing the nature of the mind means discovering it through direct experience and dwelling in this nature in a stable way.

2. Sambhogakaya is a pure mode of manifestation of the buddhas, on the level of light, rather than on the level of matter. For the other Bodies of Awakening see note 11.

3. On Taranatha, see page 94. A great realized scholar.

4. In Tibetan, གསུ་ལོ་བཀོད་

5. Kalu Rinpoche (1905-1989) was Bokar Rinpoche's main Teacher. He lived the first part of his life in Tibet and the latter part in India, having established his monastery in Sonada near Darjeeling. He passed away there at the age of 85 in 1989.

6. Khenpo Donyo is a great scholar and a lama who has lived near Bokar Rinpoche since his childhood.

7. The Karmapa is the head of the Kagyupa order to which Bokar Rinpoche belongs. Tsurphu, near Lhassa is the Karmapa's monastery in Tibet.

8. Two lamas who actually reside in Bokar Rinpoche's monastery in Mirik were present at this teaching. They are the ones who reported Kunu Lama's words to Bokar Rinpoche.

9. Chogyur Lingpa (1829-1879) as well as Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820-1892), and Jamgon Lodro Taye (1813-1899) mentioned later, were three great masters of the renaissance of Tibetan buddhism in the 19th century. They were the main architects of the nonsectarian school (Tibetan, *rime*).

10. Tibetans distinguish between two kinds of crystal. There is the water crystal giving a sensation of freshness when touched by the sun's rays, and the fire crystal that gives off a sensation of heat.

11. The idea of the buddha's Bodies tries to express various modalities of the awakened being. Three classifications are proposed. They are the Two Bodies, the Three Bodies, or the Four Bodies.
- the Two Bodies
* Absolute Body (Dharmakaya): nonmanifested aspect, pure awareness of awakening
* Formal Body (Rupakaya) manifested aspect of awakening
- the Three Bodies
In this classification, we add the Absolute Body as a division of the Formal Body into two. Therefore we have:
* Absolute Body
* Body of Enjoyment (Sambhogakaya), the manifestation of awakening at very subtle levels that can be called luminous
* Body of Manifestation (Nirmanakaya), the manifestation of awakening at the level of ordinary material reality, for example, in a human form.
- the Four Bodies
* Absolute Body
* Enjoyment Body
* Body of Manifestation
* Body of Essence Itself. It is not, strictly speaking, a fourth Body, but a way to emphasize that the Three preceding Bodies are not separated but are one in essence.

12. In Tibetan, སྒྲོལ་མའི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་རྟོག་པ་བདུན་བརྒྱ་པ་

13. The protuberance of the crown (Sanskrit, ushnisha) of the buddhas allows them to express tantras, as they would with ordinary means of expression. Other tantras, such as those of the deities Ushnishavijaya (Namgyalma) or Sittatapatra (Dukkar) were also expressed through the crown protuberance.

14. In the text of the praise used by Taranatha, the word འཁོར་ལོ་ (wheel) in the third line of the ninth stanza in Tibetan, does not have the agent ending ས ; this allows his interpretation. In other texts, the presence of the agent ending ས (འཁོར་ལོས་) results in an entirely different meaning. In this case see Rose-Marie Mengual's translation, founded on another commentary, "she whose rays of her own light (radiating) from (her hand) adorned by a wheel fight in all directions."

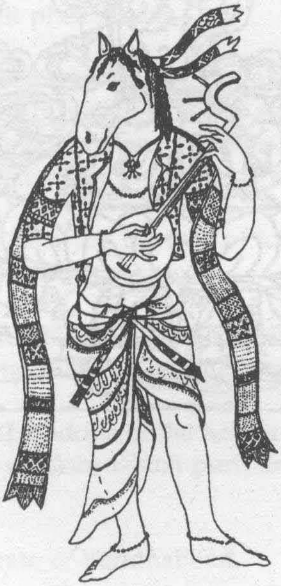
15. The third line of stanza 13 in Tibetan ends with དགར. In other versions, the same word is written དགའི This leads, once more to different interpretations. See Rose-Marie Mengual, "she who, right leg

extended and left leg folded, totally destroys the army of enemies of those who rejoice in the turning of the Wheel of Dharma."

16. The last word of the first line of stanza 16 in Tibetan ends with a genitive that is waiting for an unexpressed complement. In his commentary Taranatha explicates this complement as being ཐུགས་ (mind of compassion) which justifies his interpretation.

17. Arhathood designates the liberation in the framework of the tradition of ancient buddhism.

18. The *Vinaya*, collection of the Buddha's words on ethics.



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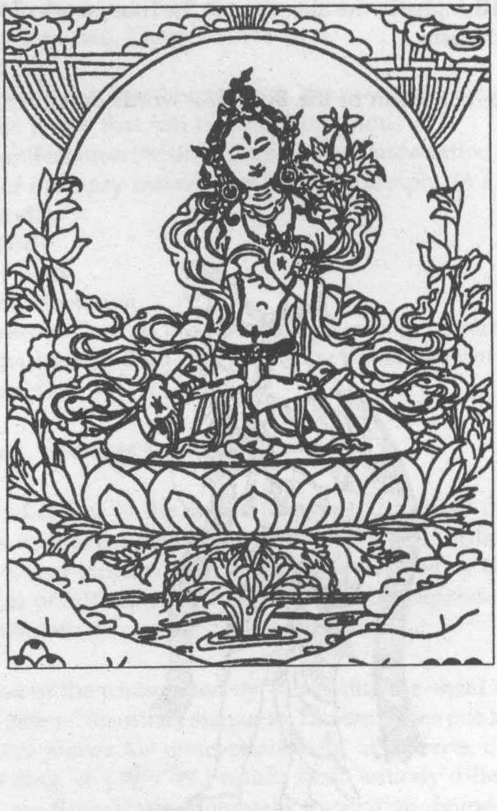

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: (Sanskrit, *siddhi*). The ordinary accomplishments correspond to obtaining some powers like clairvoyance, walking in space, and so on. The sublime accomplishments correspond to the realization of the nature of the mind.

ACCUMULATION OF MERIT: Practice of positive activity allowing us to store energy for progressing on the spiritual path. This accumulation of merit can be achieved through the practice of giving, making offerings, reciting mantras, visualizing deities, and so on.

ACCUMULATION OF WISDOM: Practice of understanding the empty nature of all phenomena.

ACT: Physical action, words, or thoughts.
NEGATIVE ACT: All negative deeds which deliberately cause others to suffer and leave on our mind an imprint of more suffering that will condition our experience and vision of the world.
POSITIVE ACT: Following the law of karma, an act is positive when it creates happiness within us.

AFFLICTING EMOTIONS: Desire-attachment, hatred-aversion, ignorance or mental dullness, jealousy, pride, and so on.

AMOGHASIDDHI: Buddha of the Activity Family; manifestation of accomplishing wisdom which purifies jealousy; North; green in color.

AWAKENING: State of buddhahood.

BEINGS: There are six classes of beings: gods, demigods, human beings, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings.

BODHICITTA: Aspiration to obtain Awakening in order to help all beings.

BODHISATTVA: A being who follows the bodhicitta path and seeks to obtain Awakening not only for himself or herself but for the sake of all beings. An ordinary being who commits to practice bodhicitta. One who has attained Awakening and dwells in one of the ten stages of the bodhisattvas. A bodhisattva can be physically present in our world or abide in domains of more subtle manifestation.

BODHISATTVA POSTURE: Seated with legs crossed, left heel against the perineum, right foot and leg are bent flat in front.

BODY: Ordinary physical body. State of possessing numerous qualities, in Sanskrit, kaya.

BUDDHA NATURE: Potential of Awakening inherent in all beings.

BUDDHA: One who has awakened. A person, as the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. In Tibetan, *Sangyay*. *Sang* means purified from the conflicting emotions, duality and ignorance; *gyay* means that the infinite potential of qualities of a being is awakened.

BUDDHAHOOD: Awakened state characterized by wisdom (as knowledge of the true nature of phenomena and their manifestation in the three times), compassion for every being, and power to help all beings.

CHENREZIG (Tibetan): Avalokiteshvara (Sanskrit). Buddha of Compassion. Most popular Tibetan deity, his mantra is OM MA NI PAD ME HUNG. See *Chenrezig, Lord of Love* (ClearPoint Press).

CLARITY: With emptiness, one of the aspects of the nature of the mind. Clarity designates the dynamic aspect which includes the faculty of knowing and creating all manifestation.

CLEAR LIGHT: Nature of the mind.

COMPASSION: Aspiration to liberate all beings from suffering and causes of suffering.

CONSCIOUSNESS: From a dualistic point of view, each object of the senses corresponds to a consciousness. There are six or eight consciousnesses depending on their classification. First, let us consider six consciousnesses:
- visual consciousness (forms)
- auditory consciousness (sounds)
- olfactory consciousness (smells)
- gustatory consciousness (tastes)
- tactile consciousness (tangible objects)
- mental consciousness (imaginary objects)

One can add two other consciousnesses:
- disturbed consciousness or ego consciousness which corresponds to the influence of afflicting emotions on our relationship to phenomena
- potential of consciousness or "all-ground consciousness" (Sanskrit, alayavijnana) which contains all the latent conditionings of karma.

DAKINI: Celestial female being. Most of the dakinis are liberated from samsara.

DEDICATION: Aspiration that any merit accumulated through our positive *acts* serves to attain Awakening for the benefit of all beings.

DHARMA: Buddha's teachings or the spiritual path.

DHARMAKAYA: Absolute Body, designating a state beyond any spatial or temporal determination; corresponds to emptiness.

DORJE SEMPA (Tibetan): Vajrasattva (Sanskrit), deity of the Vajrayana who is the source of purification practices. The practice of Dorje Sempa includes a visualization as well as recitation of a mantra of 100 syllables.

EMPOWERMENT: A Vajrayana ritual transmitting the blessing of a deity and allowing its practice. There are many empowerments. Often, the empowerment is followed by the disciple's commitment to practice this deity but sometimes the empowerment can also be received as a simple blessing.

KADAMPA: Lineage originating with the teachings of the great Indian master Atisha, in the eleventh century.

KAGYUPA: One of the four great schools of Tibetan buddhism. The other ones are Gelugpa, Nyingma, and Sakya schools. The Kagyu lineage originated with Marpa the Translator in the 11th century.

KALPA: Cosmic era of an extremely long duration.

KARMA: The law of karma describes the process of cause and effect. It is a three-phase process:
- an act leaves an imprint in the mind of the one who acts (cause).
- this act is stored in the potential of consciousness and is slowly ripening.
- this process is actualized in a particular form of suffering or joy (result).

LAMA (Tibetan): Guru (Sanskrit). A spiritual teacher.

LOVE: Aspiration to bring happiness to all beings.

MANDALA: Literally "center and surrounding." The world seen as an organized universe. Designates a deity with its surrounding environment. Can be represented on a thangka which is then used as a support for the visualizations.

MANDALA OFFERING: Practice during which we imagine offering the mandala of the universe to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

MANJUSHRI: (Tibetan, Jampal Yang). Bodhisattva of wisdom.

MANTRA: Sacred sounds, the repetition of which helps the mind purify itself and develop its potential for Awakening. For example, the mantra of Tara is OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA.

MIND: This term can refer to the ordinary functioning of the mind called "psyche" as well as the absolute, nondual pure essence of the mind beyond the fluctuations that may affect the ordinary mind.

MUDRA: Hand gesture accomplished during rituals.

NIRMANAKAYA: Body of Emanation; appears as human or other forms to guide ordinary beings.

PRAJNAPARAMITA: The sixth perfection (paramita) of wisdom, the direct knowledge of the absolute. Female deity.

PROTECTORS: Deities who, having attained liberation, are able to disperse obstacles and to create conditions favorable to the practice of the dharma.

PURE LAND: Domain of manifestation of a buddha's mind. There are many Pure Lands one can access depending on one's aspiration and accomplishment. They are not part of samsara and are not affected by suffering. Being born there does not mean that one has achieved complete Awakening but will provide one with the means to progress on the spiritual path. For example, Dewachen is Amitabha's Pure Land.

PURE SUPPORTS: They are used in meditation. Statues representing the buddha's body; texts expressing the buddha's speech; stupas symbolizing the buddha's mind.

PURIFICATION: All negative acts performed in this life and in the past lives have left imprints in our potential of consciousness. These imprints will ripen, engendering suffering and obstacles to our spiritual practice. Purification will neutralize these imprints in order to avoid or reduce their effects. A qualified teacher might designate specific practice to do in order to purify oneself.

SHAKYAMUNI: Literally "wise man of the Sakya," name of the historical buddha who lived in the 6th century BCE.

SAMBHOGAKAYA: Body of Perfect Experience, it appears to guide beings in the Pure Lands.

SAMSARA: Cycle of conditioned existence in which each being is born and dies. It is characterized by suffering, ignorance, impermanence, and illusion.

SANGHA: Community of buddhist practitioners. One distinguishes ordinary sangha from the Noble Sangha which is composed of those who have attained the bodhisattva levels.

SEVEN BRANCH PRAYER: Traditional prayer taking different forms but always having the following seven points:
1 homage
2 offering
3 regret of faults
4 rejoicing of accumulated merit
5 requesting the buddhas to teach
6 requesting the buddhas to remain in this world
7 dedication.

SKILLFUL MEANS: All activity allowing spiritual growth such as rituals, reciting mantras, visualization, prostrating, circumambulations, offerings, giving, patience, and so on. With wisdom, skillful means form a complete spiritual path.

SUFFERING: Generally it is analyzed on three levels:
- suffering of suffering: physical and mental pain experienced by all beings.
- suffering of change: one experiences suffering when happiness ends.

- suffering of conditioned existence is suffering one undergoes because of the deluded nature of samsara. It ends only when one attains Awakening.

SUFFERING OF THE HUMAN REALM: Birth, aging, sickness, death, sorrow, grief, despair, having things we do not like, losing things we like, not getting what we wish for, and so on.

SUPPORT: Any object of concentration, material or mental, used by a practitioner in meditation.

SUTRA (Sanskrit): Text of the exoteric teachings of the Buddha.

TAKING REFUGE: Placing oneself under the protection of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha (the Three Jewels). In the Vajrayana, one also takes Refuge in the Three Roots, Lamas (root of grace), Yidams (root of accomplishment), and Dharma Protectors (root of activity).

TANTRA: Text of the esoteric teachings of the Buddha which is related to a deity. There are four classes of tantras in relation to types of outer observance, empowerments, methods of meditation, and particular levels: Kriya Tantra, Charya Tantra, Yoga Tantra, and Anuttarayoga Tantra. The fourth class is divided into father tantras, mother tantras, and nondual tantras.

TERMA: Text or object hidden most often by Padmasambhava (Tantric Indian master who introduced buddhism to Tibet in the eighth century) in order to be discovered when it is necessary.

THANGKA (Tibetan): Traditional painting on cloth representing deities, mandalas, or teachers of the lineage.

TORMA: A ritual object made of flour and butter used to represent a deity (tentor) or used as an offering (bultor).

THREE DOORS OF LIBERATION: the body, speech, and mind.

THREE TIMES: The past, present, and future.

THREE WORLDS: The samsaric realms or spheres of Desire, Form, and Formlessness.

TWO PHASES: The two aspects of deity meditation. The creation phase includes visualization, reciting mantras, praise, and offerings. The completion phase is the absorption of the visualization into emptiness.

TWO TRUTHS: The relative or pedagogical truth is the way phenomena manifest and the interdependency of their evolution. The absolute or certain truth refers to the empty nature of this manifestation. The two truths do not contradict each other; they are simultaneous.

VAJRA POSTURE: It is also called "diamond posture." Seated with legs crossed, first, the left foot on the right thigh then the right foot on the left thigh.

VAJRAYANA: Path of buddhism also called "diamond vehicle" referring to the part of the Buddha's teachings written in texts of an esoteric nature called tantras. It uses recitation of mantras, visualizations of deities and works with the subtle winds or energies.

VEILS: That which obscures our buddha nature such as ignorance, latent conditioning, dualistic perception, afflicting emotion, karmic veils, and so on. TWO VEILS: Afflicting emotions and dualistic perception that veil our buddha nature.

VISUALIZATION: Creation of a mental image used as a support in a meditation or ritual. These images can be geometrical forms or deities, moving or still. This exercise is not dependent upon visual perception but upon inner faculty of imagining.

YIDAM: A personal deity expressing the pure nature of the mind. A deity upon which one meditates after having received an empowerment.

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